MUGHAL AND DECCANI PAINTINGS

From the collection of
the National Museum

DR. DALJEET

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About the book

A rare synthesis of visuals of Mughal and Deccani miniatures- including rare, unpublished works- with supporting text that highlights the details of both the generic subject matter and individual details, this book is essentially an encyclopaedic catalogue. Consisting of paintings from the National Museum, some of the rare works reproduced here include, for the first time in print, materpieces such as the Hamzanama folio, and the portrait of the Abdulla Qutb Shah.

This rich treasury of pictures is accompanied by a text that has nuances to add to the knowledge of art between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, along with indicative differences between these two distinctive schools of miniature painting. The rich repository of information contains references to popular fables, legends and myths, and the manner in which these have been used by the artists. This, in turn, establishes a social history of the times since both the subjects and their treatment include cultural, political and social denominators.

The artistic treatment, the geographic delineations, and the Islamic and Safavid Persian inspiration that egged on the artists, and their aristocratic patrons, has resulted in a body of work that chronicles contemporary mores from a fascinating period in Indian history.

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DR. DALJEET

Prakash Books

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحیم رب یسر وتمم بالخیر

الهی این چه فضل است که با دوستان خود کرده که سر که

ایشانرا شناخت ترا یافت و سر که ایشانرا یافت

ترا شناخت الهی آنچه پسند میلزم که مباد ابهج

Dedicated to the memory of
Late Dr. Karl Jamshedji Khandalavala
and
Late Dr. Laxmi Prasad Sihare

रगों की रुह से था जिन्हें इश्क बेहिसाब,
हम लोग भी फकीर उसी सिलसिले के हैं।

Infatuated were they to what throbbed behind the colours,
it is this their way we feel committed to.

PREFACE

Under its programme of cultural exchange, in January, 1994, India had sent an exhibition of paintings to Brussels, mainly Mughal and the Deccani — from the collection of the National Museum, New Delhi. It consisted of sev enty selected miniature paintings from medieval India depicting, with great artistic merit, various aspects of her life as it prevailed then, and also India's glorious past.

As incharge of the collection of paintings in the National Museum, I had the privilege of planning, managing and escorting this exhibition to Brussels. I also had the honour of preparing for the occasion a catalogue of the paintings which the Royal Museum of Arts, Brussels arranged to publish in French and Dutch. The catalogue was highly appreciated and had remained in great demand. There was a feeling that an English version of the catalogue could have been equally important and useful. When I returned, in India too the same feeling prevailed and a demand for its English version was persistently felt. The present volume is the result.

While preparing the text for this English version, the earlier material has been reviewed and re-examined in a wider, broader perspective, and supplemented with new material. Some thirty paintings from the earlier catalogue have been replaced. Most new ones that have been included are great masterpieces.

The introductory part, instead of laying emphasis on the historical aspects, focuses on the contemporary, creative genius that ranged through violence, greed, ambition, political upheavals, uncertainties, betrayals and such. Of these, only those essentials that helped in upholding creativity as part of political history have been covered. The entries to various paintings are not mere captions, or only technical and stylistic data. Each consists of the thematic details and the artistic merit of the work. Besides, effort has been made to view the paintings between the lines as it were — to seek reflections of the contemporary socio-political conditions, re-structuring the personal and the psychological build of the historical figures depicted therein, determining the objective or the feeling that the artist might have had when rendering them.

I have not laid much emphasis on why a certain painting has been classed as the Mughal or the Deccani. Such classification is based just on the broad stylistic features of a painting as, to my mind, a common viewer of art finds, instead, his relevance in a painting, or in a work of art, in how it moves his feelings, his emotions, his thoughts, in how it appeals to his imaginative faculties, his aestheticism, his spirit and in what he has in it common with him. As this catalogue brings to public view several masterpieces which the apex museum of the

nation has in its prestigious treasure I wish, besides whatever antique value they have, that they are instrumental in imparting aesthetic delight and pleasure.

For opening several academic avenues, the credit goes naturally to my institution, the National Museum. I also feel grateful to my Director-General and my colleagues in the Museum who kept alive the creative and congenial atmosphere in the institution. I especially thank Dr. Vijay Kumar Mathur of my department for his useful references and suggestions to the subject. Smt. Pratibha Parashar, library incharge in the Museum and her staff, Dr. Nasim Akhtar and Shri Sunil Khanna of the Department of Manuscripts also deserve special thanks for their help. I also thank Shri Raghav Manjhi and Chaubeji for the assistance they have rendered.

I am highly grateful to Shri R.K. Dutta Gupta who, more than a photographer, always boosted my morale as an elderly family member and justified the fond title with which we usually call him - 'Dada'. I am also thankful to Dr. S.M. Yunus Jaffrey of the Delhi University for helping me in reading some of the inscriptions.

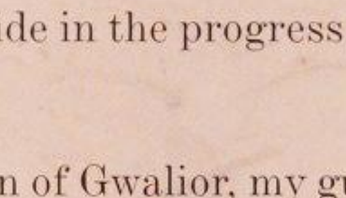
I would like to utilise this occasion for expressing my reverence to my mother who has been a perennial source of inspiration and strength to me. Without her blessings and encouragement, this work would not have been possible. I affectionately remember my loving younger sister Prem Bharti who sought delight and pride in the progress of my work and encouraged me to work even harder.

I have no words to express my gratitude to Prof. P.C. Jain of Gwalior, my guide-friend, who took special care and interest in reading the manuscript and breathing into it fresh perspectives.

I must not forget to thank Shri Ashwani Sabharwal and his wife Pinki Sabharwal without whose cooperation and enterprise, I could never have considered bringing out this prestigious volume. It was Ashwaniji who, on seeing the French catalogue, suggested for a book on the subject in English — the present volume is its outcome.

Finally, my grateful thanks to all those pioneer authors whose works I have used as reference while working on this volume.

Dated: Kartik Poornima, November 14, 1997



Dr. Daljeet

MUGHAL PAINTINGS

The Mughals, the wild, nomadic plunderers of Mongolia, underwent a change from their first moments on Indian soil. Plunderers they may have been, but they did not plunder this land, instead adding to her glory, pride and prosperity. They carried with them a reputation of brutality and savagery, but in India they spread a culture of sophistication and creativity. They were foreign invaders who invaded India's borders and inflicted on her injuries, but their invasions were less penetrating than their love for this land, and the injuries not as grievous as their efforts to bring to her prosperity, to revive her confidence in her past, and to revitalise her inherent genius. Perhaps India, with her great spiritual strength, transformed the wild, nomadic tribe into one of the most cultured and sophisticated communities of the world and, in turn, created for herself in the form of the Mughals an instrument for her own upliftment.

The Mughals, more or less all of them, from Akbar to Aurangzeb, used their Midas touch for everything they touched: trade, industry, crafts, technologies, agriculture, literacy, pursuits of learning, calligraphy, script-writing, philosophical innovations, and those things that related to man's creative faculties — poetry, painting, dance, music, architecture, the preservation of the past and all that they thought worthwhile. With greater social security, a stable monarchy, rational administration, secure borders, the country underwent a complete transformation: a new social order with greater adaptability and a more liberal approach emerged. It was a period which witnessed the rise of new roads, beautiful gardens, splendid buildings — forts, tombs, mosques — and magnificently rendered miniatures, fine muslins, finely detailed carpets, rich tapestries, elaborate costumes, beautifully carved goblets inlaid with precious stones, huqqas, glass hangings and, above all, a highly evolved language and sophisticated etiquette.

The credit of laying the foundation of the Mughal empire in India goes to Zahiruddin Mohammed Babur, a descendant of the Chaghatai Turk Timur of Samarquand and a relation of Chingiz Khan's family on his mother's side. He penetrated Indian borders several times but his invasion around the year 1524 was the most decisive when, after a chain of successful battles including the great battle of Panipat, he was able to establish, in 1526, the great Mughal empire on Indian soil.

Asian history considers Babur among the more romantic and interesting personalities of the world - a great soldier and leader, an accomplished equestrian and blessed with a strong willpower. With this, he combined a highly imaginative and perceptive mind with fine

literary taste and the bent of a keen naturalist. Though he spent a considerable period of his life on horseback, with sword in hand, he managed to steal some moments from the battlefield, exchanging the sword for a pen to record his eventful journey through life. The *Babur-nama* is perhaps the only such work after Julius Caesar's account of his conquest of the Gauls. Babur's narration is not only an account of his conquests or of his chivalry, but it also reveals his great love for nature and for all that he had seen on Indian soil. His descriptions of flowers, trees, plants, fruits, animals and birds is so vivid and lively that it surprises even naturalists. In this connection, the *Babur-nama* is considered the first illustrated natural history of this country.

Babur's eldest son and successor, Humayun 'the fortunate' did not live up to his name. The empire he inherited was vast but loosely knit. He surrounded himself with kinsmen, all of them greedy and ungrateful, tolerating them because of a promise he had made to his father on his death bed. Their betrayal and his own vacillating nature led to his defeat at the hands of Sher Shah Sur in 1539 forcing him to flee for life in exile. His only gain during his exile was his marriage with Hamida Bano Begum who bore him a son named Mohammed Jalaluddin, later known as Akbar. Humayun was able to recover his father's empire before he died on January 24, 1556.

The empire that Akbar inherited was unstable and insecure, but he was able to consolidate it successfully. His victory over Hemu at Panipat, known in history as the second battle of Panipat, brought under his command all the territories which his grandfather, Babur had conquered. Akbar's rule of about half-a-century was aimed primarily at expansion through conquest and consolidation with strong military power, and at establishing a sound system of administration and a liberal and broad-based religious, social and political policy. With almost the whole of India under his rule, he was able to penetrate deep in south up to Godavari river. Having realised that the majority of his subjects were Hindus and that the two major religions, Hinduism and Islam, though apparently in conflict, showed signs of mutual accommodation as revealed by the bond between Muslim Sufis and Hindu mystics, Akbar decided to use it to his advantage and introduced such policies as to bring about a certain measure of tolerance at all levels. The hated *Jiziya* or religious tax imposed against Hindus was abolished. Hindus of distinction and talent were raised to high ranks in the state. He married a Rajput princess and made her his principal queen, implicitly encouraging Hindu-Muslim matrimonial alliances. He initiated welfare projects like constructing roads, irrigational tanks, wells for drinking water and, above all, monuments to serve as symbols of both authority and benevolence. This helped him to maintain law and order in his vast empire.

World history has been witness to the ascendancy of the arts and letters when peace and prosperity reign. Akbar was an enlightened sovereign who realised the importance of both — the art of war and the art of peace. Abul Fazl, Akbar's court historian, in his *Ain-i-Akbari* writes that nothing escaped his majesty's reforming hands. The training of hunting falcons, for example, was considered as important and vital as the regulations for the recruitment in the army and other positions, or perfecting the system of record keeping for the empire. He established a library where he was able to promote remarkable literary activity encompassing the writing of histories, chronicles, poetry and also translations from other languages into Persian, the language of his court.

Abul Fazl's *Ain-i-Akbari* gives a short but valuable account of Akbar's imperial studio, the *Tasvirkhana*. A studio where more than a hundred artists and painters worked together was set up under the supervision of the two Persian painters, Mir Sayyad Ali and Abd-as-Samad. A new style emerged here, judiciously amalgamating in it the elements of both the Indian and Islamic worlds. The outlines of individual figures were drawn with the utmost care. Ornamental designs and motifs were used to add to the grandeur of the figures. Details were made more realistic.

Akbar conceived the art of painting as an intellectual and spiritual discipline aimed at the realisation of God, a concept contrary to Islamic tenets. His revolutionary ideas included a more liberal education with less emphasis on conservative Islam reflected in every aspect of life. Abul Fazl quotes him as remarking at a private party that he disapproved those who disapproved painting as, for him, a painting was a subtle means with which a painter was able to realise God. Akbar held the view that in the process of creating a painting, an artist was forced to think in the manner of the Creator as he drew lines, limbs and shapes, failing only in putting in them the pulse of life. His clear, philosophical bent of mind echoed the same thoughts as those propounded by the theorists of early India about the creation of art. He was of the view that the arts were divine instruments for illuminating the past, and so chose to illustrate the best of it, elevating the present by generating a climate for creativity and intellectualism, and for paying a way — a tradition for the times to come with the result that generations of Mughals after Akbar too remained devoted to artistic pursuits and creativity. Akbar was the pioneer of all that has subsequently been called 'Mughal'.

He had several works illustrated for providing a visual aid to linguistic renderings of themes, the best known of which is *Dastan-i-Amir Hamza*, the story of Amir Hamza, the uncle of Prophet Mohammed. The illustrated version of *Dastan-i-Amir Hamza* contains 1,400 paintings rendered over fifteen years with several Indian and Persian painters working on them.

Important works illustrated during Akbar's time include the romantic tale of *Laila-Majnun*, *Shahnama*, the epic of ancient Persia, *Khamsa* of *Nizami*, a classic of Persian literature, *Babur-nama*, the memoirs of his grandfather, *Twarikh-i-Alfi*, the history of a thousand years, and the Persian translation of the epic *Ramayana*. One of the greatest creations of Akbar's period was, however, the illustrated *Mahabharata* called *Razm-nama* containing 169 paintings, completed in 1589. It is said that for the *Razm-nama*, a sum of four lakh rupees was paid to the artists including the chief artist Dasawant. But the history of his own achievements contained in *Akbar-nama* painted during his lifetime is said to have caused him the highest expenditure. The manuscript displays not only extraordinary merit in depicting a theme in its entirety but is also a great visual means for understanding and assessing Akbar's character. It is said that in 1574, Akbar established a record office and asked older courtiers and others to recollect their memoirs of earlier years. The material was made available to Abul Fazl, and he presented the first part of the *Akbar-nama* to Akbar in 1596. Abul Fazl, the son of Shaikh Mubarak and brother of Abul Faizi, was born in Agra on January 14, 1551. He was gifted with extraordinary intelligence and memory. He mastered, at the early age of fifteen, all the branches of knowledge known as *Manqul*. However, his friendship with Akbar provided him with a new concept of Indian history.

If Akbar had an interest in anything parallel to his empire, it was painting. Abul Fazl writes that Akbar, in spite of having to look after such a vast empire, found the time to supervise and evaluate the work of his artists. It was due to his appreciation, encouragement and personal interest in their work that the artists of his court attempted the mixing of colours and a boldness in the execution of details as part of the overall plan and finish. The drawing of lines in the paintings of his period are extremely rhythmic. In portraiture, especially in portraying his family album, facial features are rendered with minute details with each hair for the moustaches and beards drawn distinctly. Physical proportions are carefully maintained and, whatever the age, the faces are usually rounded and beautified.

Akbar's approach to painting, more particularly to illustrating texts, was both aesthetic and practical. His interest in creating visual manuscripts was intense and personal. Before he died, he had collected in his *Kitab-khanna* twenty-four thousand volumes, neatly hand written and calligraphed, many of them illustrated. Akbar placed calligraphy on par with the art of painting, and considered the two as supplementing each other.

Akbar recognised merit, honoured distinction and bowed to genius. He humbled kings but went out to win his subjects' hearts. A theocrat — the propounder of a new

faith — a great judge of men's nature, a protector and great promoter of arts, the wisest of men and the bravest of soldiers, Akbar left his son Jahangir a well-organised, financially sound and militarily secure empire.

Born in 1569, Jahangir succeeded his father to the throne in October, 1605 when he was thirty-six, taking the title *'Nurud-din-Muhammad-Jahangir-Padshah Gazi'*. He ruled till 1627. Jahangir was the first to open India's gates to the British when, in 1609, he granted Capt. Hawkins permission for setting up a factory on Indian soil. Later, in 1615, Sir Thomas Roe came to his court as the ambassador of King James I and became the most effective instrument in promoting Britain's commercial, political and religious interests and cultural and art trends in Mughal India. He remained in court for three years.

Jahangir devoted much more time to creative and artistic interests. He had a sharp eye sensitive to the beauty of both humans and nature. His appreciation for the arts, a passion for rare objects, a taste for literature and reverence for all cultures, thoughts and ways of life framed for his view of polity. During his reign, Mughal painting freed itself from the fetters of Iranian influence, acquiring a new awareness and touching new heights. He also promoted calligraphy, giving it the foremost rank in the arts of the Islamic world. The paintings of his period reflect both the warmth of heart and the vitality of flesh. The beauty and delicacy of colours reached their heights of perfection. It is said that besides illustrated texts and portraiture, Jahangir, like Timur and Babur, decorated the walls of his palaces with paintings. Akbar had built a palace by the side of Dal lake in Srinagar (Kashmir). Inside it, Jahangir erected a lofty terrace and had its walls adorned with pictures. The two European travellers, William Finch and Sabastien Manrique recorded in detail six sets of such wall paintings in Jahangir's palace.

As a prince, Jahangir had the occasion to observe the painters in his father's atelier. As a result, he developed an interest in the arts when very young. It was because of such interest that he employed Aqa Raza, an Iranian painter of fame, in his personal service. Jahangir not only took pride in the works of his artists but was also liberal and benevolent to them. In 1618, he honoured Abul Hasan, the painter, with the title of *'Nadir-uz-Zaman'* for his painting depicting Jahangir's accession which constituted the frontispiece to the *'Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri'*. He wrote of Mansur, another famous artist in his court, that he had become such a master of his art that he was given the title of *'Nadir-ul-Asr'*, or the wonder of the age, and in the art of drawing was unique in his generation.

The paintings acquired a decorative character, using patterned borders. A study of details and an insight into the characteristic features of all they observed, resulted in realistic renderings of nature and its depiction with its deeper knowledge and intense feeling, forming some of the cardinal features that artists of Jahangir's court initiated,

obviously under the influence of their patron. The rendering of facial expressions and details of other human forms was greatly improved. It is said that Jahangir urged his artists to paint him realistically. The most substantial and lavish manuscript illustrated during his reign is his own memoirs, the *Jahangir-nama* or *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*.

Jahangir's empress Nurjahan stood beside him in attempting to bring about a change in the culture and lifestyle of the era. The improvements in attire, both at court and outside, are to her credit. She introduced changes in the way women dressed, inventing the *panchtola* costume. Her new patterns in *badla* (brocade) and *kinari* (lace) and above all her *Farh-i-Chandini*, or sandalwood coloured carpets, became renowned in her own lifetime. She also laid down new patterns and elegant designs for many gold ornaments. Her *Itra-i-Gulab* (perfume of rose) also known as *Itra-i-Jahangiri*, became a popular distillation of roses. She was also well versed in Arabic and Persian and helped her husband in spreading intellectual thinking. A versatile genius, she was the only Mughal empress adept not only in the arts favoured by women but also in those arts considered the sole preserve of men. The Raza Library of Rampur has a picture of her with a rifle bearing eloquent testimony to the freedom she enjoyed beyond the confines of the *zenana*. Her example paved the way for the freedom of women, at least among the upper class, in the Mughal empire.

It was the age of renaissance when Indian, Persian and European elements underwent a fusion, merging into something absolutely novel and grand. The celebrated painter Bishandass from Jahangir's court was invited to Persia by Shah Abbas I to paint his portrait. When he returned to India at the end of six years, he carried back with him some Persian influences while leaving behind in Persia and, through Persia, on European art, remarkable Indian impact. The famous European painter of the period, Rembrandt, exhibits these influences in several of his paintings and, out of his love for Mughal miniatures, collected a large number of them. It is true that under Jahangir's guidance and connoisseurship, the Mughal miniature had become an art of subtle refinement.

The Mughal empire continued to enjoy the momentum gained during the 16th century upto the rule of Shahjahan, but decline set in simultaneously. Politically, there was little of significance during Shahjahan's reign but of all Mughals, it was he who seems to have realised the meaning of magnificence and artistic grandeur. At the time of his coronation he took on glorious titles: *'Abul Muzaffar Sahiab-Al-Din Muhammed Sahib-i-Qiran-i-Sani Shah Jahan Padshah Ghazi'*. In his memoirs Jahangir indicates that his son Shahjahan was an outstanding gemologist and fine designer of jewellery. He extended patronage to jewellers, jade craftsmen, metal workers and textile weavers. The use of rich inlay work in the Taj Mahal and other monuments reflects Shahjahan's personal taste and skill in designing.

It is for his architectural achievements that Shahjahan is best known. His additions and alterations to the Agra Fort, the construction of Jama Masjid and Red Fort at Delhi, and of course, the Taj, have won him a place in history as one of the greatest builders of all times. It is said that his ambition always goaded him to achieve the unsurpassable. Shahjahan's court represented the heights of regal splendour. The two great marvels of his court were the famous peacock throne *Tahkt-i-Taus* and the celebrated diamond known as *Koh-i-noor* which was presented to the emperor by Mir Jumla.

Inspite of his interest in architecture, Shahjahan maintained the glory of Mughal miniatures. The artists of his time, while continuing the earlier traditions, had distinguished themselves in durbar scenes and of processions and festivals with the greater use of gold. Special mention may be made of the splendid durbar with the emperor seated on the peacock throne. The peaceful and prosperous reign of Shahjahan witnessed changes in attitude in every walk of life. The school of painting was now supervised by Mohammad Faqirullah Khan who was assisted by Mir Hashim, an excellent portrait painter.

Shahjahan's chosen heir apparent, Dara Shikoh was also an influential patron of fine arts. He commissioned albums of portraits and plants and animal studies for himself as well for his wife. A large number of portraits of women, and scenes from the harem first appeared in these albums, subsequently becoming the main feature of Indian painting. Women from a noble lineage as well as those of more common descent are characterised with the same features. The portraits of women are not a record of actual likenesses — the artist hardly had the opportunity to see the subject of his portrait and, under the circumstances, depended on his imagination and on conventional ideas. A few characteristics in the treatment of female figures appear to have been borrowed from the Indian tradition.

Aurangzeb's rule (1658-1707) was nearly as long as that of his great-grandfather Akbar, but nothing could be more different than their visions as two rulers. With Aurangzeb's advent, the course of Indian history changed. A devout Muslim, he remembered the holy *Quran* by heart and insisted that his sons follow his example. He was a scholar of Arabic and Persian, and his letters are considered masterpieces of epistolary literature. In his personal life, he was simple, pious and austere. However, this piety and simplicity did little to bring him peace of mind or release from the anxiety that his sons would attempt to dethrone him as he had his father. He was brave, intelligent and vigorous but did almost nothing to promote culture, art, literature and architecture. There are two monuments, the small Moti Masjid mosque in the Red Fort at Delhi, and Bibi ka Makbara at Aurangabad, to his credit. Being an indefatigable administrator, he had little love for art and music. Except for a few pictures of the aged emperor during the last phase of his life, artists and painters received neither encouragement nor patronage from him, instead suffering a setback

because of his austere, rigid life pattern. Aurangzeb is therefore viewed as a monarch who inspired unbounded admiration while, at the same time, inciting hatred to an amazing degree. After his death in 1707, the decline of the Mughal empire began. No longer did a 'great Mughal' sit on the throne of Delhi — yet the Mughal empire lingered for a further century-and-a-half despite court intrigues and foreign invasions.

There was a last flicker of the dying candle in the name of Muhammad Shah (1719-48). Royal patronage for the arts, music and painting was revived during his period. Unable to control the military confusion and political pressures, Muhammad Shah had retired to his palatial surroundings where he was able to patronise courtly pursuits. His wife Udham Bai, seeing her husband's lack of will to govern the empire, took charge of state's affairs. A dancer to whom Muhammad Shah had given the status of a queen, she became a major political force. However, in patronising the arts, she too honoured the Mughal tradition. Chitraman and Govardhan are two of the known artists of this period. Painting achieved a certain refinement. Moonlit revelries and music parties were favourite themes with painters, forming an interesting record of contemporary life. Stylistically, however, the characteristic Mughal style remained just as discernible, especially in the refined lines and subdued colour schemes.

In 1738, the Persian Nadir Shah invaded India. He defeated Muhammad Shah and occupied Delhi. The massacre he ordered on the citizens of Delhi is remembered with such horror that his name has become synonymous with indiscriminate, brutal killing. The invasion shattered the cultural life of Delhi. He looted not only the rich collection of Mughal gems and jewellery but also the peacock throne and several illustrated manuscripts, carrying them with him to Iran. With the disintegration of the Mughal empire, the splendour shifted from Mughal court to those of Oudh and the Deccan. As a matter of fact, the Mughal governor of Oudh, Sadat Khan, who had declared himself independent, had carried with him the refined tastes of the Mughal court. These helped enrich Oudh painting. In Oudh paintings, a large number of figures are deployed with a fine sense of rhythm and a choreographic sense of grouping, and landscapes with trees and vast perspectives are depicted with great care. The refinement of line, the delicacy of brush work, the use of soft tones and the portrayal of luxury and grandeur are the legacies of the Mughal artists that spread to different states and prevailed over many years.

THE COURT OF KAY QUBAD

An illustration from the epic Shahnama

Persian, pre-Akbari, circa A.D. 1540-50

Paper, 30 x 18 cm

Acc. No. 48.8/30

The *Shahnama*, the book of kings of Iran, was composed by Qasim Hasan Mansur, in A.D. 1010. After listening to the couplets composed by him, Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni conferred on Mansur the title of Firdausi because he transformed the court of Mahmud into *'Firdaus'*, i.e., 'heaven'. He composed sixty-thousand couplets for the *Shahnama* and completed this work in 30 years. Mahmud had offered to pay him a gold coin for each couplet but later paid only in silver coins. Firdausi distributed the coins among the poor and returned home broken-hearted, but not before writing a small poem in praise of Mahmud. Upon reading the poem, Mahmud announced a reward of a thousand gold coins for the person who would bring Firdausi back to his court. On learning of Firdausi's whereabouts, he sent his trusted courtiers with sixty-thousand gold coins but, alas, Mahmud's belated efforts were in vain. Firdausi was no longer alive to receive the reward. Mahmud used the amount to order a tomb in his memory. Firdausi's *Shahnama* was written in Persian. It narrates stories of the achievements in war and love and the tales of valour of the fifty kings of Iran. There are fifty chapters, each highlighting the glory and achievements of the fifty kings. It also throws light on the social customs, traditions, feasts, festivals and cultural aspects of Iranian life. After the Turarrian invasion Zal and his great son, Rustam, the legendary hero of Iran, pledged to find a rightful heir to the Iranian throne. Zal was informed that a legitimate descendant of Faridun, Kay-Qubad, was living on Mount Alburz. Zal sent his son Rustam to Mount Alburz.

It is with this background in mind that the present miniature is rendered. Rustam is seen reaching Mount Alburz where he finds the moon -faced young prince, Kay-Qubad, seated on a hexagonal throne under a tree in a lush garden. He is impressed to see that the prince is capable of simultaneously enjoying music and dance, attending to his court and courtiers while at the same time pronouncing judgement for a theft. Rustam discovers that the prince is genuinely liberal with his courtiers who are allowed to enjoy fruits and sweets in his presence, whereas the prince is busy in imparting his duty. His love for the performing arts is symbolised by a band of musicians playing varied musical instruments and the figure of a dancer. To impress it further, the artist has painted two human figures with peculiar musical instruments instead of the customary 'chauri bearers' behind the throne.

THE STORY OF YUSUF AND ZULAYKHA
Persian, pre-Akbari, circa A.D. 1540-50
Paper, 29 x 18 cm
Acc No. 57.92/46

Among tales of love and romance, the story of Zulaykha and Yusuf, known in the *Bible* as Joseph, is as popular in Iranian literature as are the tales of Laila and Majnun and of Khusraw-Shirin. Jami's version of the romantic tale of Yusuf and Zulaykha is considered the most profoundly rendered. As it goes, Yusuf was considered the most handsome of his time. His father's unusual love and favour for him incite bitter jealousy in the minds of his brothers who attempt to kill him by dumping him in a well. Luckily, a caravan of merchants passes by and they rescue him. But Yusuf's ill-luck continues. He becomes the property of a slave merchant who carries him to Egypt to sell. Princess Zulaykha hears of his beauty and buys him, bringing him to her palace.

This interesting painting depicts the occasion of Yusuf's auction. The princess has come in person to bid for him. Realising that the boy's beauty can earn him fabulous wealth, the merchant has dressed Yusuf in splendid clothes and seated him on a golden chair. The artist, however, knows that Yusuf is no ordinary person. To symbolise his great spiritual strength, his inexhaustible energies and capacity for sacrifice, he has painted an unusual flamed halo around his face. White Safavid turbans and the use of Persian blue with orange and light green colours add to the beauty of the painting.

نزاز جان خود ساخت و گفت ما و این عشق دل افروز که جان ما جانم
ما خود از اول دوست نگفتیم که عین ایم تا آنگاه که حضرت یوسف بمصر آمد
در نقاب عزت بگشاد آتش در اقتاد چون زلیخا برسید و عشق
برشنید و عشق چون مدتی بود که از چنین جدا شده بود و در فراق
او چگونه که چها کشیده دیوانه وار گریبان زلیخا بگرفت و او را
بتماشای یوسف کشید فریاد از نهاد زلیخا برآمد و این مطلع

THE WONDER OF CREATIONS: A NATURE STUDY

Persian, pre Akbari, circa A.D. 1540-50

Paper, 36.3 x 22 cm.

Acc. No. 56.116/24

Aja-i-bal-Mukhluqat, the wonder of creations, is the work of an unknown poet, translated in Persian by Zakariya-i-dn-Muhammad-al-Qazvini in AD 1283. The manuscript deals with subjects such as mythical creatures, animals, plants and recounts the deeds of the inhabitants of heaven and earth. This work has been popular both in Persia and India and has been often illustrated. The earliest known illustration of this manuscript was prepared in India in 1547 at Bijapur (Deccan), though the imperial copy remains unavailable, several copies exist in popular Mughal and Deccan styles.

This painting probably deals with the story of a beautiful dear which is majestically painted in the centre. The artist used pale-blue and green colours as a plain background. Sparrows, crows, parrots and peacocks as well as winged human figures are painted on the trees, as are monkeys. The artist has painted the tiger in a peculiar posture. In the foreground is a saintly male figure in an orange *jama* in the posture of prayer. The flowers and the flames seen together on his *jama* indicate that he is a mystically elevated person who has in him the intrinsic beauty and softness of a flower and the elevated energy of fire.

LADY HOLDING MIRROR
Persian, pre-Akbari, circa A.D. 1530-40
Paper, 23 x 12.5 cm.
Acc. No. 56.36/15

It was under the patronage of Safavid Shah Tahmasp the Second, a great scholar as well a connoisseur of arts, that the miniature painting gradually assumed the character of court art. Portraits of the Shah and his princes in different postures were painted. Miniature paintings serialising the classics of Persian literature, of poetry in particular, and depicting scenes from court and of outdoor life were highly favoured. Persian painters gave the miniatures a unique touch of individuality in concept and execution which clearly differentiate this school from the closely related Indian and Turkish schools. The human figures that Persian artists painted are often slim and elegant but sometimes also strongly fleshed so that, even in the case of youthful figures it becomes difficult to say whether the figure is that of a woman or of a girl.

In this painting, the young lady's eyes are fixed on the mirror, as if fascinated by her own beauty. She has unusually long tresses. Her conical hat befits her personality and enhances her beauty.

A FOLIO FROM HAMZA-NAMA
Mughal, Akbar period, circa A.D. 1570-77
Cloth, 66.5 x 49.5 cm
Acc. No. 72.774

Dastan-i-Amir Hamza, popularly known as *Hamza-nama*, is a voluminous work in Persian depicting the story of Amir Hamza, the uncle of Prophet Mohammed. He was one of few valorous persons whom Persia has known in history. Besides a number of myths and legends, the *Hamza-nama* has recorded the chivalrous deeds, strange encounters and miracles, great adventures, conquests and victories of Amir Hamza. It also includes in it tales of fairies, demons, great knights and also helpless victims. The inscription on the reverse of the folio indicates that such was the brilliance on the face of Amir Hamza that even the mightiest warriors of his time dared not look straight into his face. The folio depicts a market scene in the city of Zamur-ud-Nigar or the city of musk, with people on the streets talking of the chivalrous deeds of Amir Hamza. The Mughal emperor Akbar, greatly fascinated by the story, had the volume illustrated by his court artists. The entire *Dastan-i-Amir Hamza* was illustrated over 1,400 leaves which were bound in seventeen volumes. The illustrations were made on cloth. This ambitious project was completed over fifteen years during the early years of Akbar's reign and cost a huge sum to the empire. This folio was gifted to the National Museum, New Delhi, by the Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, Ohio, USA in 1972.

Despite skillful restoration, the details depicted in the folio are hardly discernible. According to the inscription on the reverse of the folio, the scene depicts the market of Zamur-ud-Nigar, a city known for its beauty and fragrances. The prince has just passed by in disguise but there are some people who have identified him. He is followed by the Amir (Hamza) who inquires of the prince. After he has left, people begin talking of him and one of those present claims to have once stood by the Amir's side though clearly the others do not believe him. The presence of a *firangee* has been especially mentioned in the text. For creating the appropriate atmosphere, the artist has rendered a few market activities including the depiction of a porter who is seen carrying a load twice his own size.

BIRTH OF RUSTAM

An illustration from the epic Shahnama

Mughal, Akbar period, circa A.D. 1580-85

Paper, 37.5 x 26.8 cm

Acc. No. 48.8/2

This folio from the *Shahnama* depicts the occasion of Rustam's birth. Rustam's father Zal was the king of Iran and his mother, Rudaba the daughter of the king of Kabul, Mehrab. In the painting, Rudaba is seen reclining with half-closed eyes, surrounded by her maids, after the birth of the child. Zal, his father, is seen eagerly awaiting the news seated in a balcony. Zal, after succeeding his father Sam to the throne of Iran, went on a visit to Kabul as the guest of the king. There he was charmed by the king's daughter, Rudaba, and fell in love with her. Their love culminated in the tying of the nuptial knot. Rudaba later bore him a son they named Rustam. It is said he grew to the height of eight men and had the structure of the noble cypress. History acknowledges him as the strongest man of his time. The very word Rustam today symbolises the mightiest among men.

The architecture in the painting with its marble halls and parapets is interesting. The battlements are replaced by decorated marble parapets. A charioteer is shown in a flat Akbari turban. This picture is a good example of the mixture of Indo-Iranian-Persian features. The colours used are bold and bright.

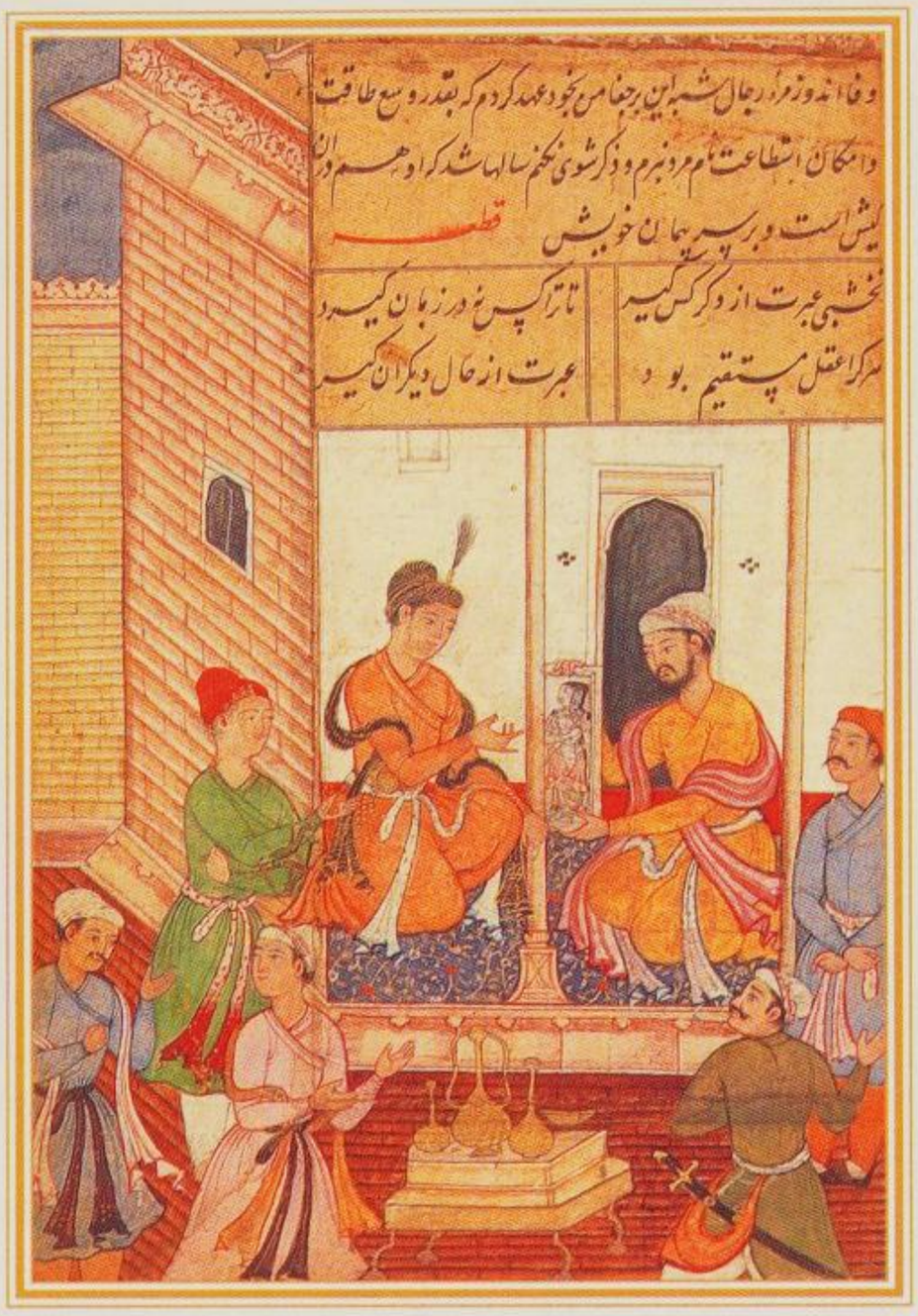
KALAWANT TANSEN
Mughal, Akbar period, circa A.D. 1590
Paper, 11.8 x 6.7 cm
Acc. No. 50.14/28

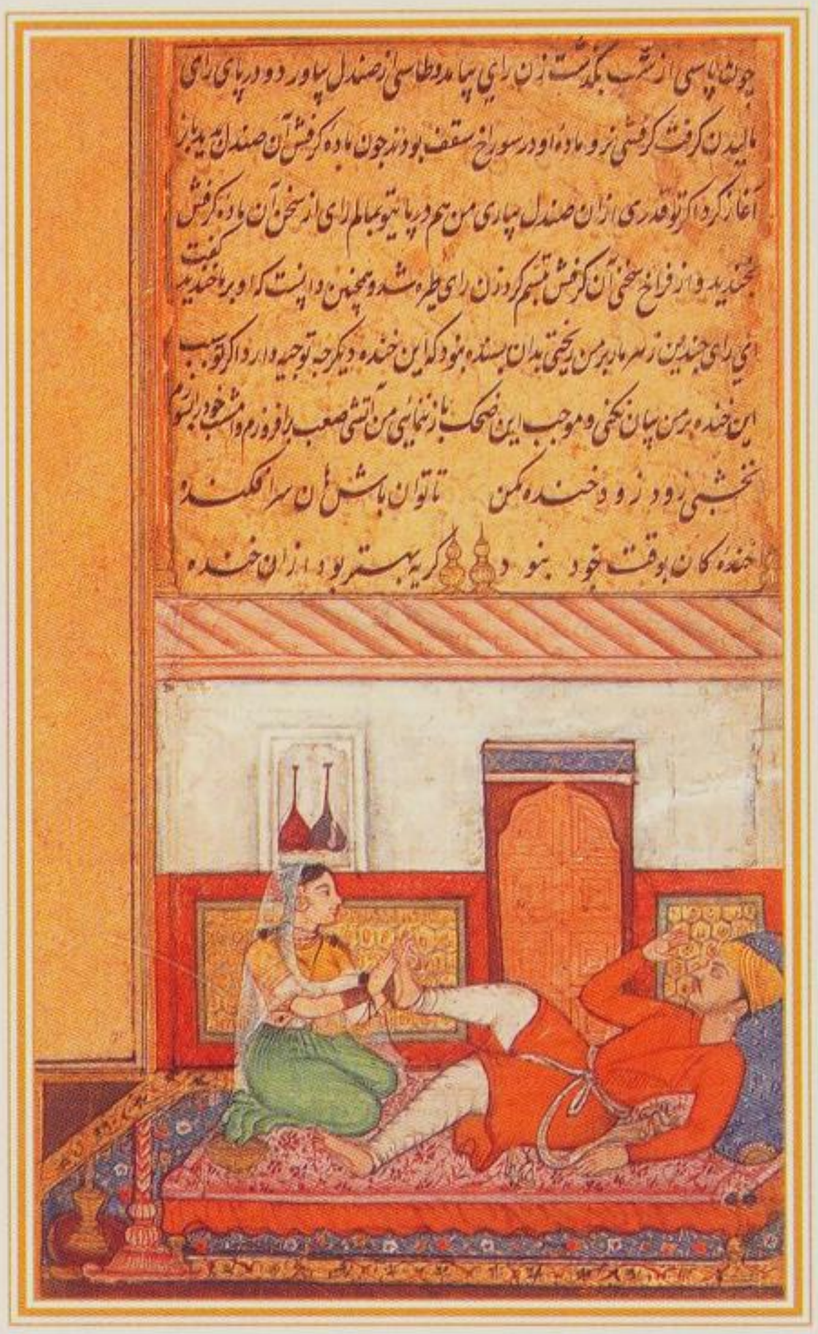
Miyan Tansen, one of the greatest singers of all times, is believed to have changed the course of nature, as clouds obeyed his dictates, the winds moved to his lyrics and unlit lamps flamed in his honour even deer, peacocks and other animals stopped to listen to his melodies. So many legends have grown around him that it is difficult to separate fiction from fact . It was in 1562 that this illustrious musician and the leading exponent of the Drupad *Kalawant* came to the court of Akbar at Agra from the court of Raja Ramchand of Rewa, Central India. He was unquestionably a great musician as well as a composer. Several Indian ragas, the *Miyan-ki-Malhar*, *Miyan-ki-Todi*, etc. still bear his name. He was also an accomplished flute player. The *Ain-i-Akbari* mentions him as an eminent vocalist from Gwalior, presumably following the tradition initiated by Raja Man Singh of Gwalior. The book records that a singer of his calibre had not been born in India at least in the previous thousand years. Jahangir also praised him as the embodiment of the art of music. Tansen, though converted to Islam, remained a devotee of the cult of Krishna.

This portrait of Tansen was presented to the National Museum, New Delhi by the late Maharana of Udaipur. It shows Tansen as a tall man with a sharp aquiline nose, pointed chin and dark wheatish complexion. He had thin drooping moustaches and side whiskers. Though the long *jama* he wears was not the dress of Akbar's court, it is possible that Tansen may have opted for a costume of his own kind, or he might have brought this from the court of Raja Ramchand of Rewa. Or perhaps he preferred the long *jama* instead of the small *chakdar jama* because of his height.

PRINCE RECEIVING A LADY'S PORTRAIT
A folio from the Tuti-nama
Mughal, Akbar period, circa A.D. 1590
Paper, 23 x 14.2 cm
Acc. No. 52.25/5

COUPLE IN THEIR BED CHAMBER
A folio from the Tuti-nama
Mughal, Akbar period, circa A.D. 1590
Paper, 18 x 12.5 cm
Acc No. 52.25/3





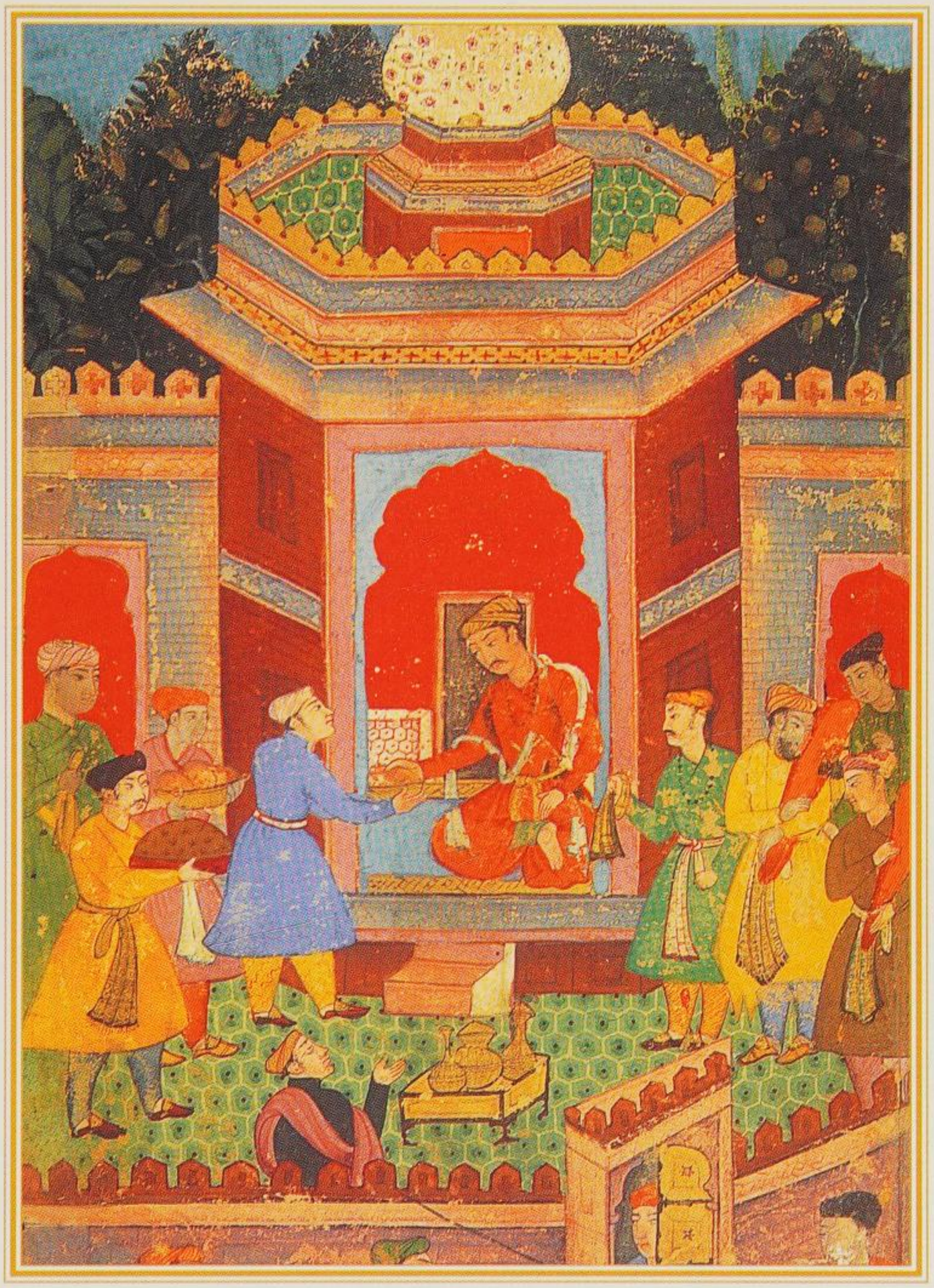
(left) The painting is a folio from the famous manuscript *Tuti-nama*, a Persian text consisting of tales believed to have been narrated by a parrot. Emperor Akbar chose to have the text illustrated by his court artists. Interestingly, in Indian, Persian as well as Arabic literature, the parrot is often used for narrating tales, particularly when these relate to descriptions of the beauty of maidens of lands far away. The basis of Malik Muhammad Jayasi's famous epic *Padmavata* is a parrot. In *Tuti-nama*, as in most other parrot-tales, the bird plays a pivotal role, entering a prince's or a princess's chamber to whisper about a suitor's matchless beauty.

In the 'Thirty-ninth Night' of *Tuti-nama*, a Chinese prince learns from Tuti, the parrot, of the beauty of a princess in Rome. On hearing of her, he falls in love with her. To divert his attention, pictures of several beautiful maidens are brought to him but they fail to entice him. Here, his *vazir* is seen producing the picture of a lady whose beauty amazes everyone present with the sole exception of the prince.
The fabulous use of gold, rich bright colours, fine calligraphy and neatly sculptured architecture are special features of the painting.

(right) The portion of the text from the *Tuti-nama* inscribed on the top of the painting here is from its version authored by Ziya-ud-din Nakhashabi who translated much of its contents from an earlier Indian version. Among the inscribed folios are some that depict scenes of the common man from his everyday life.

In this folio from the *Tuti-nama*, a lady is seen massaging the right foot of her lord with sandal paste from a bowl. The parrot, though invisible here, is also talking about sandalwood. This strange coincidence amuses her husband and removes his fatigue.
The refined draftsmanship and the delicate modelling of figures and the Persian text with a golden decorative border form an integral part of the painting. A few folios of this manuscript are the prized possession of the collection of the National Museum, New Delhi.

AKBAR RECEIVING GIFTS
Mughal, Akbar period, circa A.D. 1590
Paper, 21.5 x 15.5 cm
Acc. No. 51.69/11



A painting to Akbar was both a thing created for aesthetic delight and also a medium to record such events and policies that he thought deserved preservation for posterity. To this end, he had his court painters illustrate events past and present, legends and history, scriptures and epics, and all that he thought significant inside and beyond his court. The painting here represents one such event. Diplomacy was Akbar's subtlest weapon for winning him what even weapons of war did not for rulers before him. More than his weapons, it was his policies that won him the suzerainty of several princes and rulers.

The painting depicts Akbar as its central character though it is definitely not a folio from the *Akbar-nama*. It cannot be discerned who the prince offering gifts as a token of his subordination to Akbar, is. A remarkable feature is the use of monumental architecture to emphasise the relationship between the emperor and his vassal. The high, octagonal chamber with its domes, the battlements and the cusped arches are subtly used to achieve this aim. Another noteworthy feature of the painting is that, except Akbar who is seated, all others are shown standing, thus heightening the main theme of the painting — the acceptance of subordination

Mosque scene

A folio from a manuscript of the Tawarikh-i-Alfi

Mughal, Akbar period, circa A.D. 1594-95

Paper, 42 x 21.5 cm

Acc. No. 50.356

This is an illustration from the *Tawarikh-i-Alfi*, the history of the thousand years of the Islamic world recorded by the court historians of Akbar on his instructions. The scene is laid in a mosque where Amin, the son of Harun (786-809), is having his son's name recited during a public prayer. The *Tawarikh-i-Alfi* was chronicled in Akbar's time around 1581-82. It took about six years to be written. Akbar himself had commissioned his court historians to contribute to it. Badaoni, one of such historians in his court, has written that its undertaking fulfilled Akbar's "cherished precious belief." Abul Fazl writes, "Naquib Khan and several others commenced this history. A very large portion was subsequently added by Mulla Ahmad and the whole concluded by Jafar Beg-i-Asaf Khan and the introduction was composed by me."

This manuscript is said to have originally contained 1,500-2,000 illustrations. Stylistically, these are designed and conventionalised in a mature colour scheme and apparently seem to have been rendered by many hands. The architecture is strictly Mughal, but the figures show an European impact, perhaps because some Christian missions had by then visited Akbar's court. However, in the Islamic world, Christian visitors or European persons had no relevance, hence these figures only serve as an anachronism. The mosque, the main centre of the activity here, has a beautiful dome, an instance of great architecture.

Shiva receiving Hayagriva
A folio from the Razm-nama
Mughal, sub-Imperial style, circa A.D. 1598
Paper, 28 x 15.5 cm
Acc. No. 58.20/18

This folio from the *Razm-nama*, the Persian translation of the great Indian epic *Mahabharata*, illustrates the scene in which Shiva is seen embracing Hayagriva, an incarnation, or rather a transformation of Lord Vishnu, with a horse's head. In Indian mythology it is prevalent that among the many forms that Lord Vishnu had, there was one of Hayagriva, though such form had come to him as a consequence of a curse which he suffered for committing a folly. It is said that Brahma and the other gods conducted experiments to determine who among them was the greatest. After a series of tests it became evident that Mahavishnu was in every respect superior to all other gods. This aggrieved Brahma cursed Vishnu which caused him to lose his head. Bereft of his own head, Lord Vishnu had to attach a horse's head to his trunk to attend a *yajna* conducted by the gods. After the *yajna* was over, Lord Vishnu went to *Dharmaranya* to do penance. His friend, Shiva appeared before Vishnu and with his help, Vishnu was able to get back his original head. The imperial copy with its 169 illustrations rendered between 1583-86 is preserved in the Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum, Jaipur. The folio here is from another copy rendered some twelve years later. The Persian text is on the reverse of the folio. Folios from this second copy are scattered and available in several collections.

Acclamation of nine standards

A folio from the Babur-nama

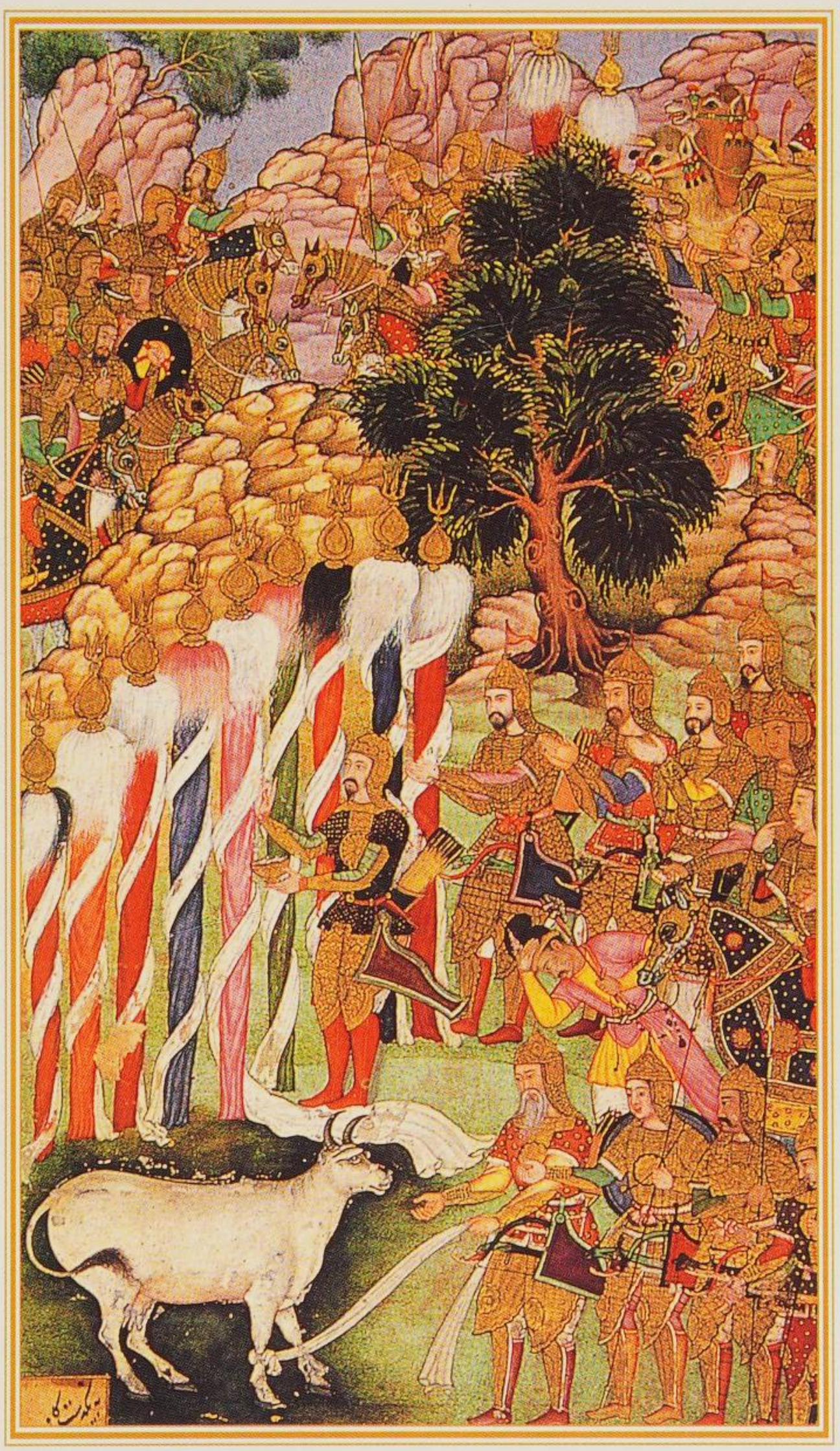
Mughal, Akbar period, dated A.D. 1598

Paper, 26 x 17 cm, Artist: Jagnath

Acc. No. 50.336/90

Babur, when ruling Kabul, observed the ceremonial traditions of the Mongols as established by his ancestor Chengiz Khan. It was in that tradition that Babur preferred to be called Khan instead of Sultan. Later Mughals adopted the title of *Padshah*. Among the important ceremonies that Babur observed was one relating to the acclamation of nine standards. The occasion for this ceremony was usually the moment when he led his army to battle. In his memoirs, Babur details one such occasion in 1502 when along with Khan and Sultan Muhammad Khanekeh, he was proceeding across the Bish-Kint on the Khujand-Tashkent road. Babur writes that after the news of Tambol advancing towards Uratippa reached them, the Khan led his army from Tashkent. When they were between Bishkent and Sam-Sirek, they arrayed their army into right and left wings. Then the Mughals blew horns according to their custom. The Khan alighted from his horse. The Mughals then fixed into the ground nine flag-poles and tied on the tops of each of them a flag-like slip made of long, narrow strips of cotton cloth. Babur then placed on the top of each of these, whisk-like shaggy haired tails of yak, the mountain ox, symbolical of great strength and victory in war. On the other hand, the Khan took into his hands a slip of white cloth and tied one end to a cow's shank-bone while holding the other in his own hand. Three slips of similar cloth were enwrapped around the flag poles and their ends laid down on the ground. Babur writes that the slip the Khan held in his hands was lowered to the ground and the Khan then stood on it. On another one he positioned himself, and on the third stood Sultan Muhammad Khanekeh. The Mughal who had tied the cloth on the flag-poles then took into his hand an ox-shank and delivered a speech in the Mongol dialect. During the speech he often looked at and pointed and made signs towards the standards. The trumpets and drums struck up and the soldiers raised war-cries. These ceremonies were repeated three times.

The painting adheres to the details of the occasion as elaborated by Babur though a departure from his description of it is apparently seen. There is no figure in the painting standing on the slip of the white cloth enwrapping the standards, or otherwise, that corroborates to the figure of Sultan Muhammad Khanekeh. Similarly, the Khan is holding one slip in his hands though it has not been lowered to the ground to allow him to stand on it. All the figures painted behind Babur and the figure of the Khan and the soldiers behind him are in subordinate postures. Babur's costume distinguishes him from the others, but again, there is no other figure that distinguishes itself from the others and may thus claim to depict the Sultan. There may be two reasons for such departure from Babur's description. Perhaps the painting was based on the celebrations of some other occasion heard or imagined by the artist. Or more probably, the artist's allegiance and reverence for the Mughal emperor led to his elimination of the Sultan, to make Babur the only central figure worthy of the honour that the ceremony imparted on the occasion.



مضبوط می سازند بعد از ان جوب را بر بند دست را در میا

طناب پیچیده می بارند طناب همان طور پیچیده و کاواک می ایستد بیل

BIRD CATCHING AT BARAN

A folio from the Babur-nama

Mughal, Akbar period, dated A.D. 1598

Paper, 26 x 17 cm, Artist: Bhag

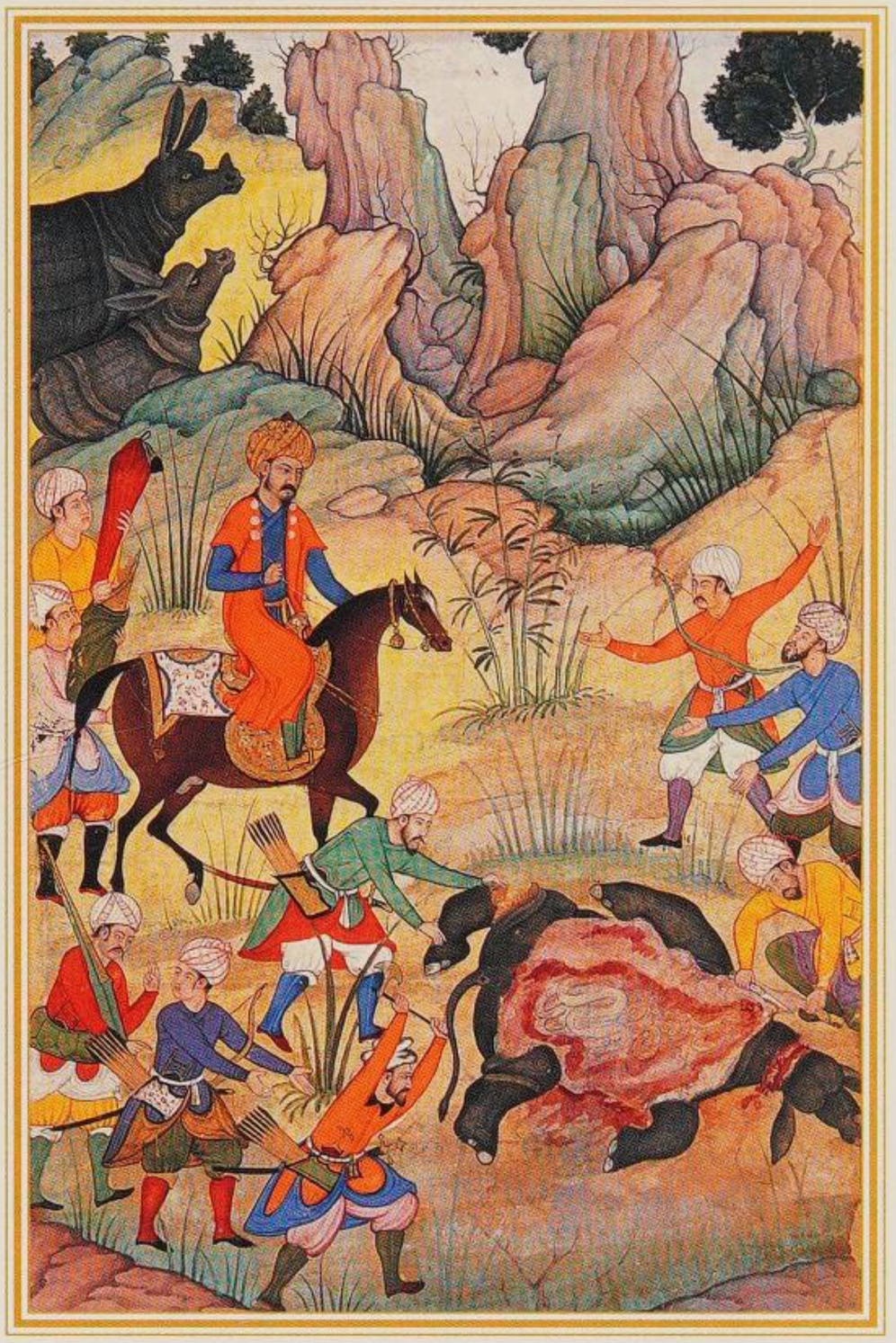
Acc. No. 50.336/132

Babur, the great Mughal emperor, recorded in his memoirs everything that attracted his attention, or he found interesting, during military expeditions. Avian life formed one of these attractions, as did the devices used for catching birds. The people of Baran, a Kohistan town in the province of Afghanistan, caught birds not so much for sport as trade. The climatic conditions of Baran attracted birds in abundance. Babur writes of two such devices used by them. In one, the end of the cord, used to entrance the bird, was tied with an arrow, its other end with a cross-like thing called *bildinga*. With the cord fully coiled on the wood-piece, the bird-catchers pulled away the wood holding it fast in their hands. The arrow was shot towards the coming flock by the force created by the pulling of wood. The people of Baran became such experts in the device that the cord usually caught a bird either by twisting its neck or by the wing. The other, more common practice was to use a pit that was not very deep, and scatter over it a net with the help of nails. Inside the net, a trained bird was positioned to attract the other birds. The bird catcher, hidden nearby, held one end of the string in his hand, the other end of which was fastened to the net. When a number of birds walked inside the net, the bird catcher pulled the string, capturing all the birds inside the net.

The artist has portrayed this second device. He has vividly populated his canvas with as much variety of birds as one may imagine. The landscape is lively and suits the occasion. The bird-catcher hidden behind an artificial cover of leaves is wonderfully drawn with his alert eyes. The painting portrays Babur's love of nature. A noteworthy feature is the beautiful depiction of *saras*(cranes) in their graceful postures.

BABUR HUNTING RHINOCEROS NEAR SWATI
A folio from the Babur-nama,
Mughal, Akbar period, dated A.D. 1598
Paper, 26 x 17 cm, Artist: Kesu Kahar
Acc. No. 50.336/215

The *Babur-nama* is reckoned among the most enthralling and romantic works of historical literature, different from and superior to the hypocritical revelations of Timur and the some-what pompous writings of Jahangir. His narrations are the best material available on the life and the reign of the conqueror. The scene painted here is based on Babur's depiction of it in the *Babur-nama*. After setting camp, Babur went off to hunt rhinoceros near Swati, a place people called *Kargkhana* (rhino-home). Though a few were discovered, they managed to conceal themselves in the dense jungle. A rhino and its calf came out in the open only to flee as arrows rained down on them. However, in the jungle, another calf was killed and it lay scorched by fire, writhing and palpitating. Each person took a share of the spoils. Leaving Swati, Babur and his band of soldiers went on ahead, returning to camp only when it was time for the bedtime prayers. The folio shows two rhinos running uphill while another lies dead in the foreground. A soldier is shown cutting the flesh of the rhino with a big knife while another removes its leg. All the soldiers are shown in action and Babur watches them seated on his stallion. The rocks in the background are painted with the utmost care.



(opposite page) BABUR CROSSING RIVER SON
A folio from the Babur-nama
Mughal, Akbar period, dated A.D. 1598
Paper, 26 x 17 cm, Artist: Jagnath
Acc. No. 50.336/336

This painting depicts an event from Babur's life exactly as it is recorded by him in his memoirs, the *Babur-nama*. The artist has vividly and minutely rendered each of the details while succeeding in conveying the mood of the crew and the army. A sense of concern, if not anxiety, for their emperor is visible on all faces. The fury of the river in flood is aptly depicted as is the aggressive posture of the alligator *(gharial)*, though alert gunmen gun it down. According to the *Babur-nama*, the incident took place on April 14, 1529 when Babur, marching through Bihar, had to cross the river Son. A number of boats had been readied for any such eventuality. He ordered the boats to be floated across the river tied abreast with each other to form a bridge across the two banks. It proved a difficult task for the boats covered only half the river's breadth. Besides, the river water too proved unpredictable: deep and shallow, swift and still, by turn. Babur writes of an alligator discovered within the ring of the boats and also of a huge fish which, out of fear of the alligator, had jumped into one of the boats where it was caught and brought to him.

The artist Jagnath has meticulously recorded these details some seventy years later with great artistic skill and imagination. In addition, he has carefully supplemented these with highly probable details, though Babur makes no mention of them. The artist has painted a *maulavi* on Babur's right side and another *mullah* praying in front, obviously for Babur's safety and success. The *maulavi* is in an orange *jama*. A fourth one holds a book in his hands which he reads — probably a prayer to the Almighty. Babur's brown horse, carried in a separate boat, also has a yak's tail. The artist has added these to convey the tension as well as the crew's anxiety for their master. The lucky standards and yak's tail, the emblems of fortune and strength, are also painted. Babur may have excluded the mention of the religious activities lest they reflect poorly on his personality, and could be taken to mean that he lacked confidence in his valour and that of his team.

خیال داشته که در یک جایی فرود آمده و نشسته بمن بتعطیم دریابد باری زود نزدیک رسیده
فرود آمدم محل آن تقاضا نکرد همین که فرود آمدم فرصت نیافته زانو زده دریافتم در اضطرار
وانفعال شده

فی الحال سلطان سعید خان و باباخان سلطان با مرسومه کوار اسپ فرود آمده و زانو زده بمن دریابند

(preceding page, left) A YOUNG CHIEFTAIN SURRENDERING TO BABUR NEAR YAGHA VILLAGE IN FARGHANA
Mughal, Akbar period, dated A.D. 1598
Paper, 26 x 17 cm, Artist: Jamal
Acc. No. 50.336/93

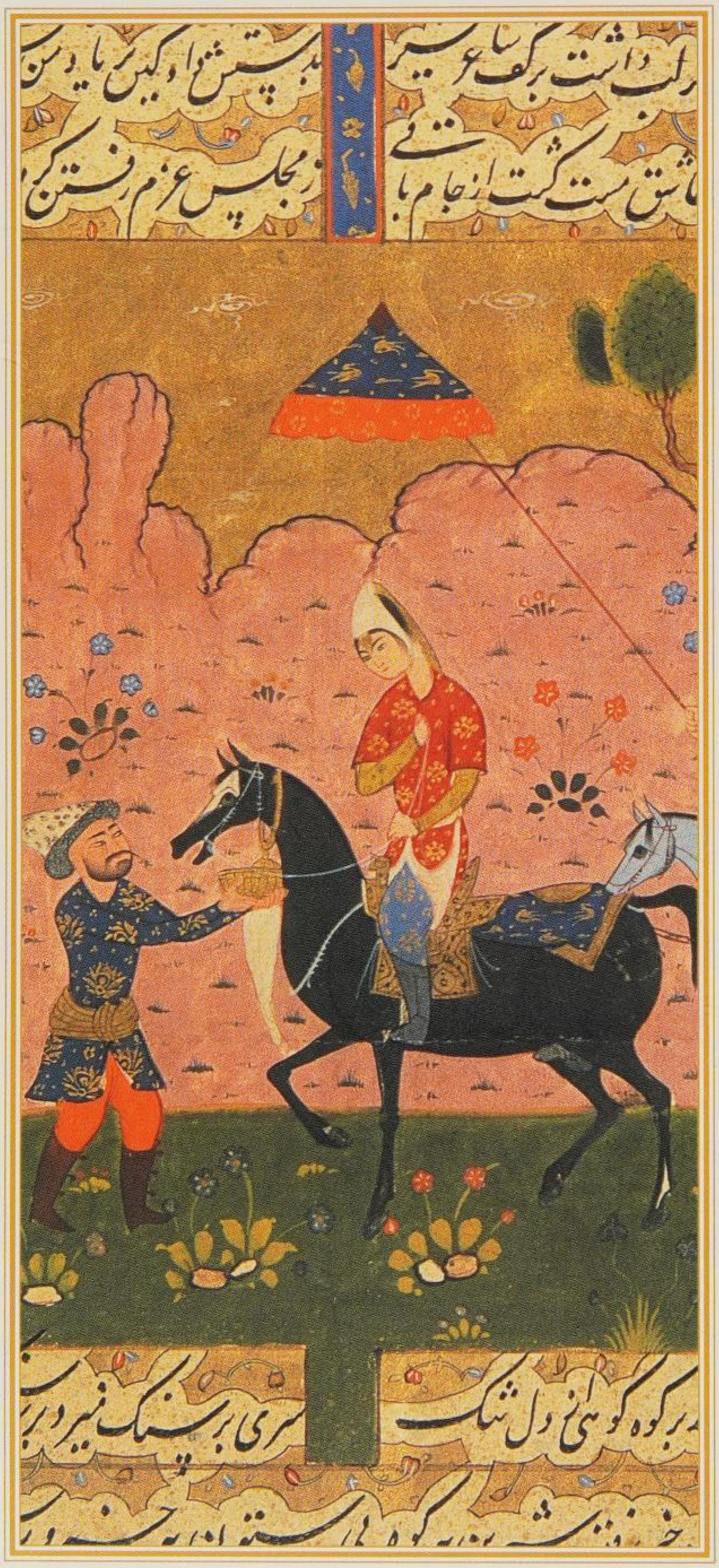
This folio from the *Babur-nama*, one of the greatest autobiographies that letters have ever created, proves that its illustrations are still greater. It is universally acknowledged that these paintings are among the best which strokes of brush ever created.

In this painting with its bright, balanced colours, the artist has populated every inch of his small canvas with handsome human figures. One among them, a young chieftain, is seen touching Babur's feet signifying the acceptance of his subordination. In Islamic tradition, the touching of human feet is prohibited. However, artists at Akbar's court had adopted several Hindu customs, especially because their patron Akbar himself believed in them. The scene is placed near the village Yagha in Farghana, his native principality, and the occasion occurs following Babur's occupation of it. It is recorded that Babur usually preferred to hold his court, as also his camps, in the open. Like his soldiers, he slept on the earth and only used a lavish throne when required for regal reasons. The surrender of a chieftain has always been regarded in feudal history as a formal, ceremonial occasion. However, Babur is seen standing here like his ordinary soldiers though an action worthy of a formal court is being performed in the open. Emperor Akbar was proud of his ancestry and especially of his grandfather, Babur. He wanted to visualise his grandfather's feats of bravery, his victories, achievements and adventures. This led to the creation of the paintings that illustrate the *Babur-nama*, his grandfather's memoirs, which he had recorded in Turkish, often when on horseback. The *Babur-nama* in the collection of the National Museum, New Delhi, has 378 folios of which 122 are illustrated with 144 illustrations. They were painted by forty-nine artists whose names are inscribed on their respective leaves. A Persian influence is clearly noticeable.

(preceding page, right) AKBAR ON A HUNT
Mughal, Akbar period, circa A.D. 1598-1600
Paper, 23 x 19 cm
Acc. No. BKN: 8.15

The painting here, probably a leaf out of the *Akbar-nama*, shows a young Akbar on a hunting expedition. Abul Fazl has recorded that Akbar loved hunting. In 1556 when Humayun recaptured Delhi and entered the city, the 13-year-old Akbar was conspicuous by his absence. He was found later hunting in a nearby forest. Though Akbar's age-factor in the painting coincides with the event recorded by Abul Fazl, yet the band of hunters with their pets and weapons indicate beyond doubt that the expedition was a pre-planned one. Abul Fazl writes that Akbar had a regular department for hunting, called *Shikar-khana*. The band of hunters with a *cheetah* in the cage and the hunting falcons bear evidence with Abul Fazl's record of Akbar's *Shikar-khana*.

In the painting, the young Akbar astride his favourite horse gallops after a deer in a dense forest crowded with wild beasts. Among the retinue, the central figure in the lower right corner is probably Bairam Khan. This is a fine specimen of Akbar's period depicting motion represented by galloping horses and by charging lion killing a *neelgai*.



Shirin's visit to Koh-a-Bestoon

An illustration from a Persian manuscript

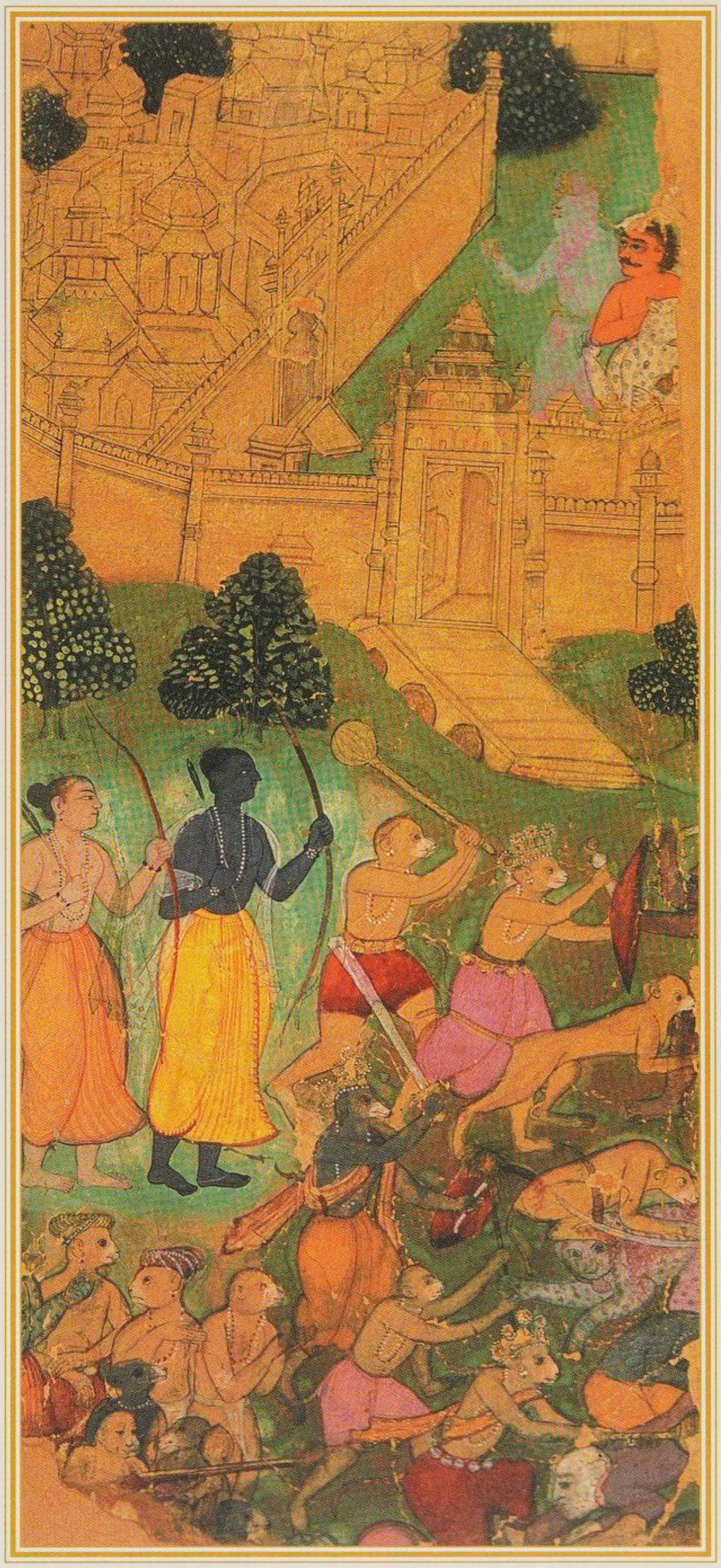
Persian style, Akbar period, Late 16th century

Paper, 18 x 12 cm

Acc. No. 61.558

This painting is based on the famous story of Shirin, the beautiful Armenian princess, and Farhad, the renowned Sessannian sculptor-architect. It is said that when Farhad heard of Shirin's beauty, he fell in love with her, creating an image in stone from the description he heard. The Sessannian King Khusraw also loved Shirin and came to consider Farhad his rival. He made several moves to frustrate Farhad but proving unsuccessful, finally proposed a task he considered impossible. Khusraw promised Farhad Shirin's hand provided he was able to bore a tunnel across the Koh-i-Bestoon mountain. Farhad began digging the tunnel and accomplished quite a large part of it. Shirin, unaware of Farhad and of his love for her, now heard of this feat and was impressed. Farhad's ceaseless toil and unrequited passion for her melted her heart and Shirin too fell in love with him. She decided to visit Koh-i-Bestoon, the site where Farhad was working.

This painting has immortalised Shirin's visit to Koh-i-Bestoon where Farhad is shown offering her a cup of milk. Obviously Persian in style, the painting was made during Akbar's time, but whether in the royal studio or outside remains unknown.



Rama and Lakshmana at Lanka

An illustration from the Ramayana
Mughal, sub-Imperial style,
Bundelkhand-Orchha, circa A.D. 1600-10
Paper, 26 x 13.5 cm
Acc. No. 61.1238

The *Ramayana*, the story of Rama, rendered in Sanskrit by Mahakavi Valmiki, ranks among the best known world epics. Akbar, an emperor highly sensitive to public opinion and to the feelings of the subjects he ruled, knew of the immense pull of Rama's personality and its tremendous impact on social and religious life patterns. He held the story of Rama's life in high reverence and had the *Ramayana* translated into Persian, and illustrated. Though this folio is not from his royal copy, yet it contains several Mughal elements, obviously from a copy painted in Bundelkhand where mural paintings depicting events from Rama's life were in popular practice. The details betray stylistic elements from mural paintings.

The painting depicts the occasion before Rama's capture of Lanka and the subjugation of Ravana. Rama and Lakshmana are seen standing outside the almost-deserted golden city of Lanka. The army, led by Sugriva and Jamvana, is seen approaching Ravana's palace. The barefoot heroes are painted in majestic, powerful postures, holding bows and arrows and looking ahead to their victory. The composition of the painting is interesting. Gloom seems to have descended on the fortified city of Lanka. The army's action is vigorously recorded. On the reverse of the painting is a Sanskrit verse from Valmiki's *Ramayana* along with its *Bundeli* translation.

RAMA KILLING DEMONS
An illustration from the Ramayana
Mughal, sub-Imperial style,
Bundelkhand, Orchha, circa A.D. 1600-10
Paper, 29 x 19.5 cm
Acc. No. 56.93/4

In this painting Rama and Lakshmana, along with their army, are seen charging Ravana's army of demons, several of whom are shown dead. The bend in Rama's bow indicates the power with which he is shooting his arrows at their targets. Jamvana in his golden crown and yellow *dhoti*, sword in hand, is depicted killing demons despite an arrow stuck in his thigh. Other commanders from Rama's army are also shown fighting the demons with their peculiar weapons. In the background, golden Lanka is surrounded by a multi-coloured hill, obviously to indicate its fortified position. The depiction of war scenes was never an easy task. Here, the painter has taken some liberty, failing to adhere strictly to the poetic version of the story, obviously to achieve his purpose. This set of miniature paintings, slightly damaged in a fire, combines in them Mughal features with decorative cloud forms and tile work characteristic of the earlier influence of the Sultanate period, in the *Bundeli* style.

RAMA DURBAR

An illustration from the Ramayana

Mughal, sub-Imperial style,

Orchha-Bundelkhand, circa A.D. 1600-1610

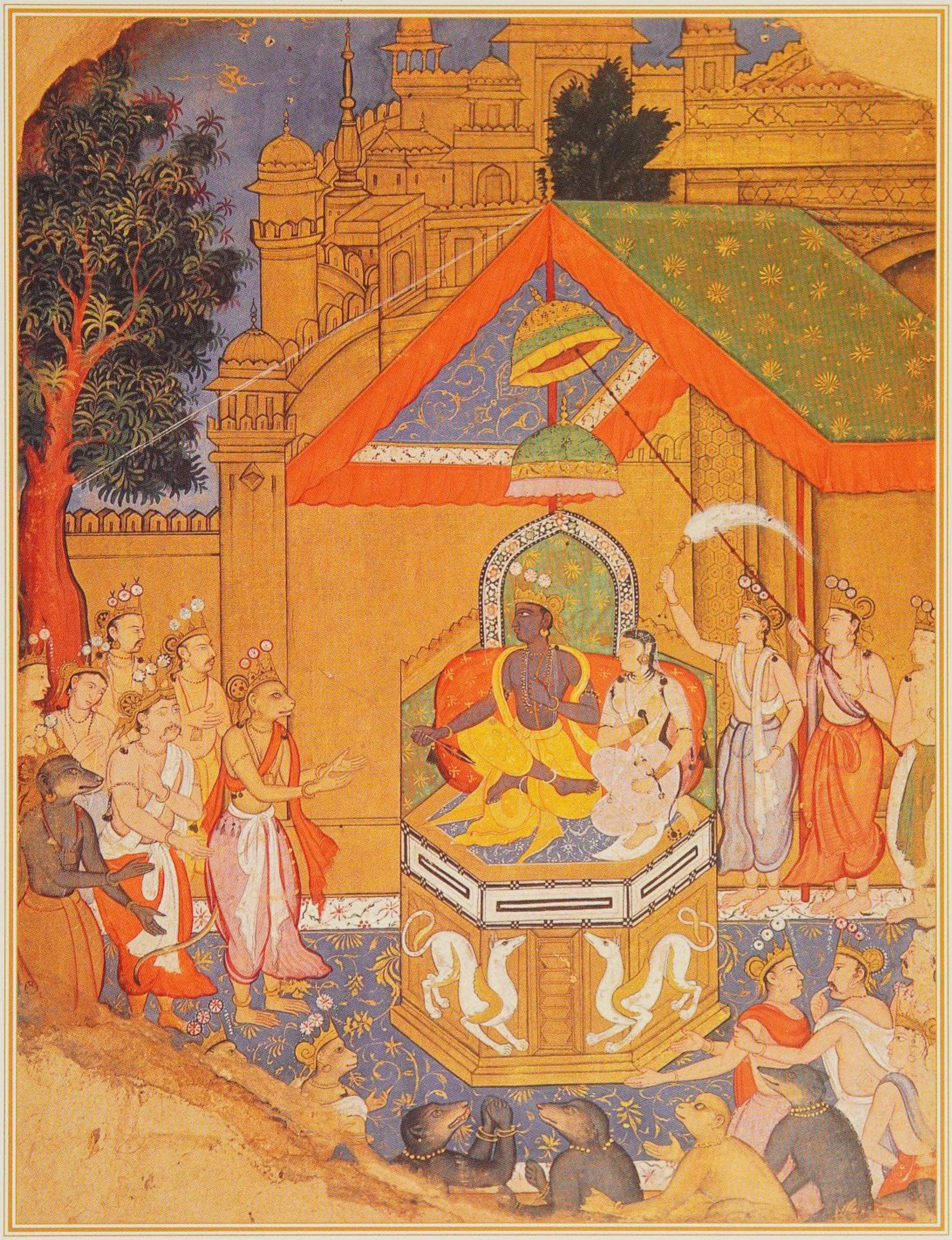
Paper, 24 x 20 cm

Acc. No. 56.93/1

Lord Rama and his spouse Sita on a throne, his brothers, especially Lakshmana, attending on them along with Hanumana — this forms the most common and widely rendered scene of Rama's life. Unexceptionally, the scene is called *Rama durbar* or Rama in his court. The reasons for the prevalence of this scene may be numerous, among them the religious needs of the large Hindu population that saw him as their supreme deity.

This painting, rendered in *Orchha-Bundelkhand,* has several Mughal elements. The architecture of Rama's palace, the tent, the carpet, the dome-like *chatras*, the use of Akbar's *atpati-pagri* or turban and the Persian effect in rendering the faces are elements that the artist seems to have borrowed from the Mughal court. However, the use of *pataka* (sash) and *uttareya* (the upper garments) that the figures are tying around their waists and shoulders, the crowns, the ornaments on different parts of the bodies of male figures, particularly the anklets, and Sita's *saree* draping her head are features of the Bundelkhand style. The two animal figures used for decorating Rama's hexagonal throne with horse-like mouths, dog-like tails and body structure, lion-like feet, and with wings, are typical of the Bundelkhand style of murals and folk paintings. The painting displays an excellent quality of line work, and has remarkable vitality and expression. Lord Rama's figure, armed with a bow and arrows, is his most common appearance; however, holding an arrow in one hand and the bow in the other while seated on his throne is peculiar to this painting. It seems the artist has followed Mahakavi Tulsidasa verbatim - "*Tulsi* shall bow to thee, (O Lord Rama), only when Thou hath in Thy hands the bow and the arrow."

(Tulsi mustak tab nave, dhanus vana lo hath)

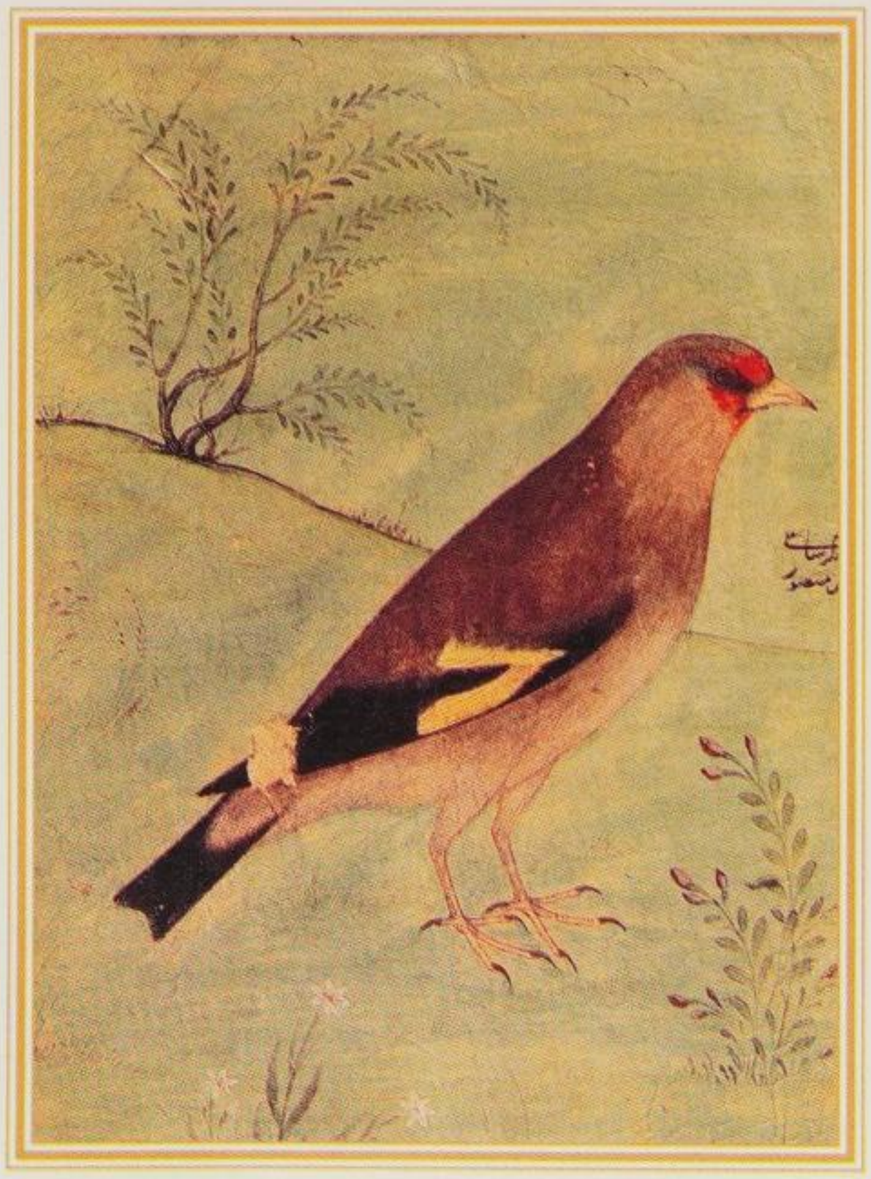


STUDY OF A BIRD
Mughal, Jahangir period, circa A.D. 1620
Paper, 7.5 x 5.5 cm, Artist: Mansur
Acc. No. 50.14/27

Jahangir is known for his love of nature, an attribute he seems to have inherited from his great-grandfather, Babur. This led several of his court artists to paint nature. Mansur, the superb painter known for the minuteness of his fine brush and delicate sense of colours, has to his credit the largest number of nature paintings. It has been rightly claimed that no one excelled him in harmoniously ordered depictions of living birds and animals in their correct moods, anatomical structures and colour schemes. Drawings of animals and birds with Mansur's signature survive in many museums and collections, showing Mughal art at its zenith of perfection during Jahangir's reign.

This painting of the bird on a light green background displays highly skilled workmanship and deep insight into the bird's life. Its exquisitely soft clothing of brownish feathers has been painted with utmost delicacy and so vividly is its alert stance portrayed that it testifies to the artist's power of subtle characterisation.

1. Amal Mansur - *Dar Zamana-i-Jahangir*.
2. Reverse: *Tasvir* of a *Janwar* by Amal Mansur.



(opposite page) JAHANGIR HOLDING THE PICTURE OF MADONNA
Mughal, Jahangir period, circa A.D. 1620
Attributed to artist: Abul Hasan
Paper, 31 x 22.5 cm
Acc. No. 58.58/31

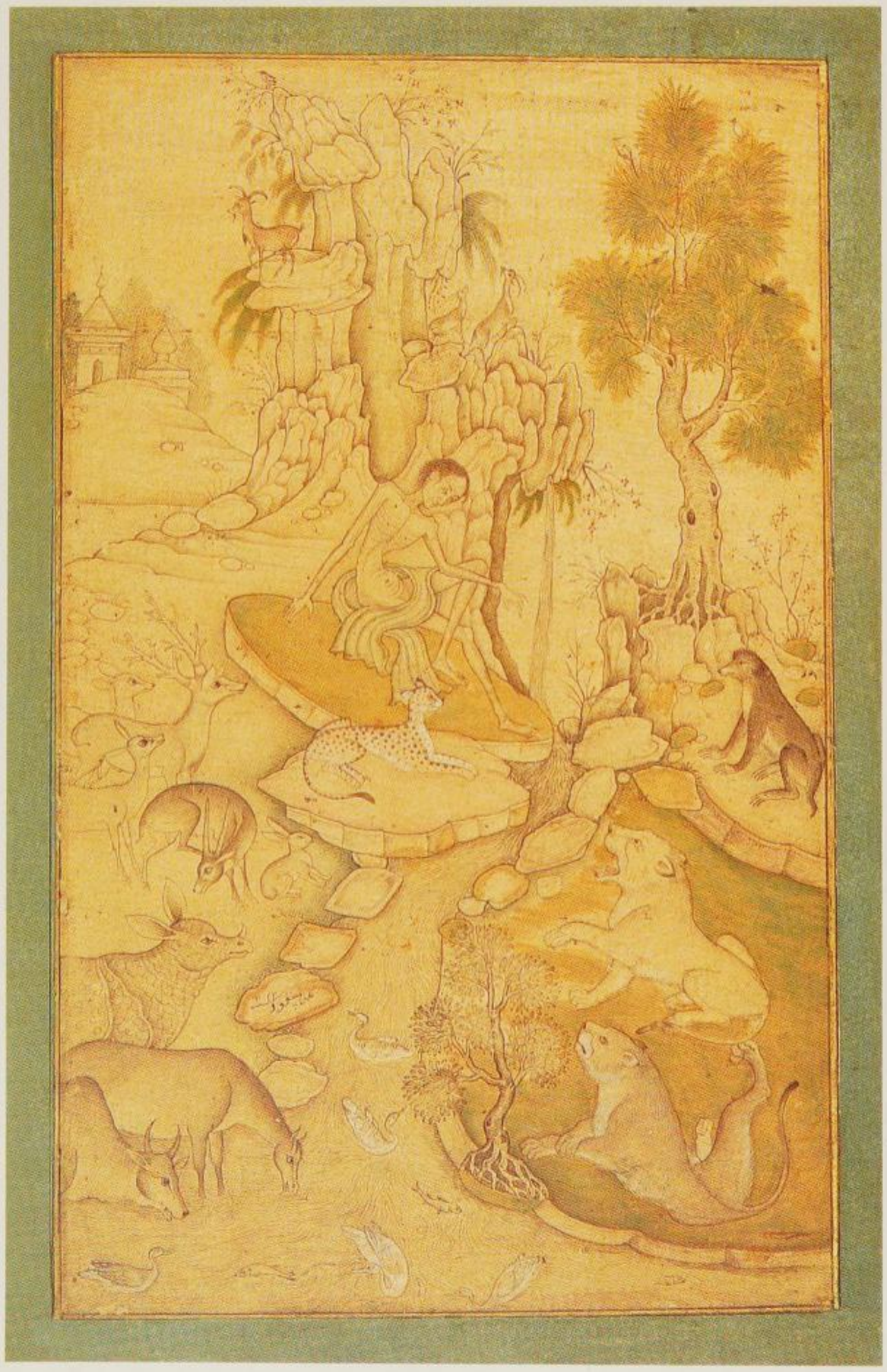
Jahangir, the great Mughal emperor and an equally great patron of arts, succeeded his father Akbar in October, 1605 and ruled till 1627. On ascending the throne, as a popular measure, he granted general amnesty, releasing all his opponents and other prisoners, and promulgated twelve rules of conduct to be followed by his subjects, and set up the famous chain of justice. A man of immense visual alertness, Jahangir gave special recognition to portraiture. His interest in the particular and recognizable characteristics of the work of each of his artists led to the intense cultivation of individual artistic styles. Abul Hasan and Bishan Das developed their expertise as portraitists during his reign.

This small but warmly drawn portrait of Jahangir is one of the best studies of the emperor, as also one of the best portraits the world has ever created. Jahangir, like his father, was liberal to all religions. His interest in Christianity is shown in his studying the picture of Virgin Mary. The emperor's head is set in a nimbus with fine rays radiating from the circle. The border is decorated with floral designs executed in gold with beautiful calligraphy in the Nastaliq script.

MAJNUN WITH WILD ANIMALS
Mughal, Jahangir period, dated A.D. 1614-15
Paper, 24 x 15.5 cm, Artist: Masood
Acc. No. 58.20/29

Having lost his love and, as a consequence, his interest in life, or rather his will to live, Majnun, the romantic hero of the famous tale of Laila and Majnun, is said to have retired to the forest wandering there in wilderness intending, perhaps, to end his life by throwing himself before the wild animals. Instead, the wild animals show compassion, proving that while men may betray and torture a man in distress, animals never betray a loving heart. Even the most cunning and unreliable among wild animals, the *cheetah*, here shown resting beside a skeletal Majnun, indicates the concern the beasts share for his welfare.

In drawing the animal figures, the artist has strictly followed the tradition and the models of the fine animal paintings of the Mughal court of his own period. He has used the Laila-Majnun theme for recreating an elaborate animal world populated with a lion and lioness, wild bear, *cheetah*, horse, bull, deer and antelopes, rabbits and spotted rhinoceros besides different kinds of fish, ducks and aquatic birds. Three goats on the distant peaks help provide dimension and space to the painting. The landscape with its finely drawn hill, a rivulet with various kinds of fish and ducks etc., trees, a far-off temple-like structure and skies, is vividly and powerfully drawn.



(opposite page) VERSES AND WINE
Mughal, Jahangir period, circa A.D. 1620
Paper, 16 x 12 cm
Acc. No. 50.14/9

The Mughal nobility, like the Roman patrician, spent their days in convivial gatherings.

In this painting we see a noble resting against a large bolster under the shade of a tree with his musician, cupbearer, bard and attendant. He is enjoying his drink and snacks while listening to verses being read by his bard. The attendant is adding some perfume to a dish, the smell of which seems to have whetted the appetite of the dog squatting close by. From a gesture conveyed in the painting, it is obvious that such is the beauty of the poetry being read to him that he forgets everything - the wine, the snacks - and lends all his senses to the enjoyment of the poetry. The painter, in paying minute attention to such details as gestures, the movement of fingers etc., has captured an unguarded moment in the noble's life and imparted immortality to it. The painting depicts those qualities of line, colour, light and human interest associated with works of the Jahangir period.

بادشاہ جہانگیر

AFTER THE LION HUNT
Mughal, Jahangir period, circa A.D. 1620-25
Paper, 35 x 22 cm
Acc. No. 54.58/4

The painting depicts a scene following Jahangir's killing of a lion. As his regal position requires, the emperor departs leaving his band of hunters to collect the kill. Jahangir loved hunting to a point of obsession. According to his memoirs, the emperor hunted for thirty-nine years from the age of twelve to fifty. During this period he killed eighty-six tigers, ten alligators and numerous other beasts and birds. Interestingly, he also noted the measurements of the animals he killed.

The painting depicts four hunters trying to load a lifeless lion shot during the hunt on the back of an elephant. The reclining posture of the elephant is superbly painted. The scene obviously depicts events after the hunt is over and the emperor has left for his palace. To indicate it, the artist has recorded the name of Jahangir on the upper portion of the painting so that though he is not seen in the painting, the hunt goes to his credit. Most artists painting this scene would have preferred to include Jahangir's person, but this artist found the aftermath more interesting. The dead lion seems to present more problems than when it was alive. The four strong men are finding it difficult to lift the carcass and place it on the back of the elephant. Will they succeed? The painter has left the answer to the viewer. Quality-wise it is a superb example of the *neemqalam* style from the Jahangir period.

Sri Raga

Visual depiction of an Indian musical mode

Mughal, Provincial, Jahangir period, circa A.D. 1620-25

Paper, 30 x 22 cm

Acc. No. 70.24/15

Ragamala paintings have given the world of art some of its masterpieces. *Ragas* as a theme have been widely followed in Indian miniature paintings by the artists of all the sects, schools and styles. *Ragas* or musical modes have their specific intonations, time and situations when they are sung or played, and the specific emotions and moods they arouse. The six principal *ragas* — *Bhairava, Malkaunsa, Megha, Hindola, Dipaka* and *Sri* — have offshoots known as *raginis* and *ragaputras*. Each *raga* and its offshoots have the capacity of involving one emotion or the other. These *ragas* analyse man's total inner being with scientific accuracy and have an inner substance or emotion which is divine in nature. The Indian masters have, therefore, personified the spirit of such ragas into visual forms and created a new mythology of music.

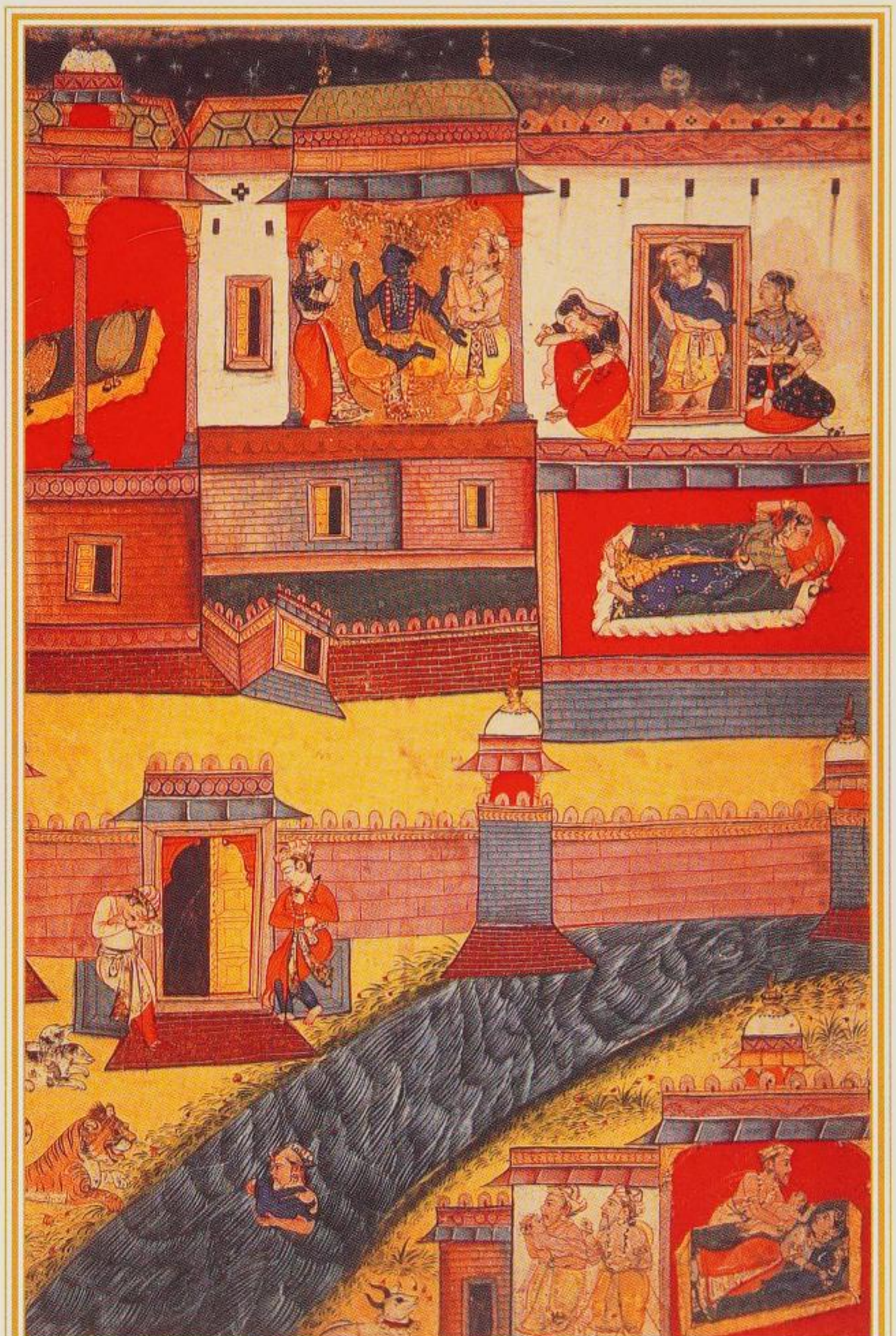
The unknown artist of the Mughal era has painted Sri Raga on a pale green background. Sri Raga, named after Lakshmi (*Sri*), was originally related to the harvest and its festivals, but in its later innovations at court it came to symbolise fortune. The artist has broadly sought to visualise the *raga* accordingly by representing the king and the queen listening with intensity to the music. The composition is excellent and in the best Mughal manner. The figures have sharp, pleasing features. The rhythm of the *raga Sri* is heightened with the judicious use of soft colours.

Birth of Krishna

Mughal, provincial, early 17th century

Paper, 29 x 30 cm

Acc. No. 63.1604



This unique painting uses artistic strength and imagination to condense into a few panels the events relating to Lord Vishnu's incarnation as Krishna, something which the *Bhagavata Purana* consumed chapters to elaborate.

The effects are achieved more by suggestive symbolism than by illustrating them in full. There are three panels in the top row. The first, on the extreme left, shows a chamber with a bed and two bolsters, symbolising Kamsa's palace. The second panel consists of the central theme of the painting. A noble and his wife have a vision of Lord Vishnu. Lord Vishnu reveals to them the secret of his incarnation as their son. The third panel has its own theme, yet also contains the key for interpreting the second one. The lower portion of the panel is the inner chamber where Devaki is seen lying. She has given birth to a baby who is now in the hands of her husband, Vasudeva, shown coming out of the door of the chamber in the upper part of this panel. The baby in Vasudeva's hands resembles Lord Vishnu in the second panel, indicating that the baby is his incarnation as Lord Krishna born of Devaki's womb. A divine voice, believed to be of Lord Krishna, commands Vasudeva to transfer him to Gokul and exchange him with Yashoda's newborn daughter. Vasudeva proceeds with the baby and finds to his surprise that all the guards and dogs are fast asleep. The bottom row shows Vasudeva crossing the river Yamuna in heavy flood. In the next panel he is seen exchanging his child with Yashoda's daughter. In another small panel adjacent to it Vasudeva, accompanied by Yashoda's husband Nanda who is a party to the secret exchange of babies, is seen emerging from the chamber with Yashoda's baby. A cow at the door of Nanda's chamber symbolises the birth of someone who would forever be identified for his love of cows.

FIGHT BETWEEN RUSTAM AND SOHRAB

An illustration from the epic Shahnama

Mughal, Jahangir period, circa A.D. 1625-30

Paper, 21.5 x 12.8 cm

Acc. No. 60.852

Rustam, the prince of Iran and the mightiest of men, who became synonymous with human strength, once lost his favourite horse Rakhsh. In distress, he reached Samangan where he was received by the king who assured him that Rakhsh would soon be recovered. The king arranged for his comforts and in the night Tahmina, the charming daughter of the king of Samangan, visited him. Struck by her beauty, the lion-hearted Rustam married her secretly. After spending some days with her, and before he returned to Iran, Rustam gave his bride his jewelled talismanic amulet which he wore on his arm and which was universally acknowledged as the key to his immense strength. He said, "Guard this, if a daughter is granted to you by fate, take and bind it on her tresses to secure good fortune and to brighten the world. But if the stars send a son, bind it upon his arm as a token of his father. He will bring down the eagle in swift flight out of the clouds and the sun will not shine on him with overpowering heat." In due course the princess gave birth to a male child who she named Sohrab. She did not inform Rustam of his birth, though she brought him up according to the wishes of her husband. By the time Sohrab was ten, there was no one to excel him in the art of war. One day Sohrab asked his mother about his father. She told him that the great warrior of Iran, Rustam was his father. She also told him that she had concealed his birth from his father to guard him from Rustam's enemies. But Sohrab decided to go to Iran to see his father. His mother gave him the jewelled amulet to carry. Upon entering Iran, Sohrab captured an Iranian knight and asked him to identify Rustam for him. The Iranian knight, out of fear, lied that Rustam was not present in the camp but later told Rustam about his encounter with Sohrab. Rustam came to the battlefield, saw Sohrab with his great shoulders and thighs and chest and told the young man he had no desire to hasten his death in a confrontation. Sohrab responded that he was convinced that his adversary was none else but Rustam, to which Rustam declined saying he was possessed of neither throne nor rank nor crown. So began a battle between the two. Sohrab fought like a leopard but Rustam overpowered him and drew a dagger from Sohrab's girdle and cleft the chest of his son. Dying, Sohrab showed Rustam the token he carried and expressed his desire to see Rustam. With tears rolling down his face, Rustam told Sohrab that he, indeed, was his father. Following Sohrab's death, Rustam left the battlefield for an unknown destination.

The painting depicts the tragic story of Rustam and Sohrab. The painting is divided into three parts. The upper part shows a warrior on his saddle witnessing the fight between Rustam and Sohrab. In the middle, Rustam is shown killing Sohrab with an arrow. Sohrab is lying on the ground. In the foreground, Sohrab's grief-stricken horse is shown. The use of yellow colour is very unusual.

نظاره برایشان دو رویه سپاه | که دارند هیچ کارگردان نگاه | نه کرد کاموس و خاقان چین | بران برز و بالا و آن زور و کین

برگشت رستم هم اندر زمان | سواری و پشتاده خاقان و مان | از ان نامور تیر هر دو کشید | همه تیرها بر در خون کشید

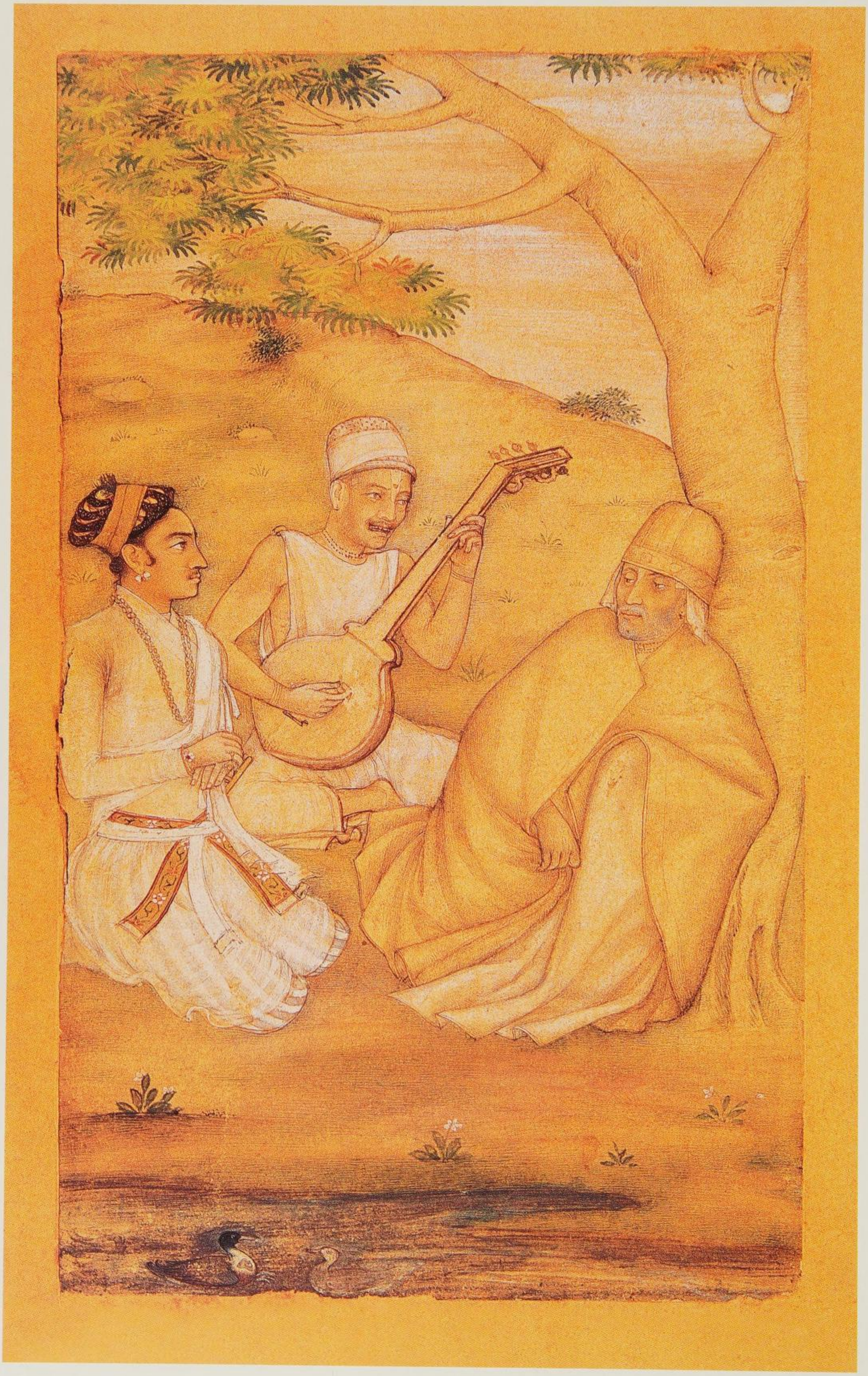
A COUPLE IN DALLIANCE

Mughal, Shahjahan period, circa A.D. 1630-35

Paper, 30.7 x 19.5 cm

Acc No. 48.8/58

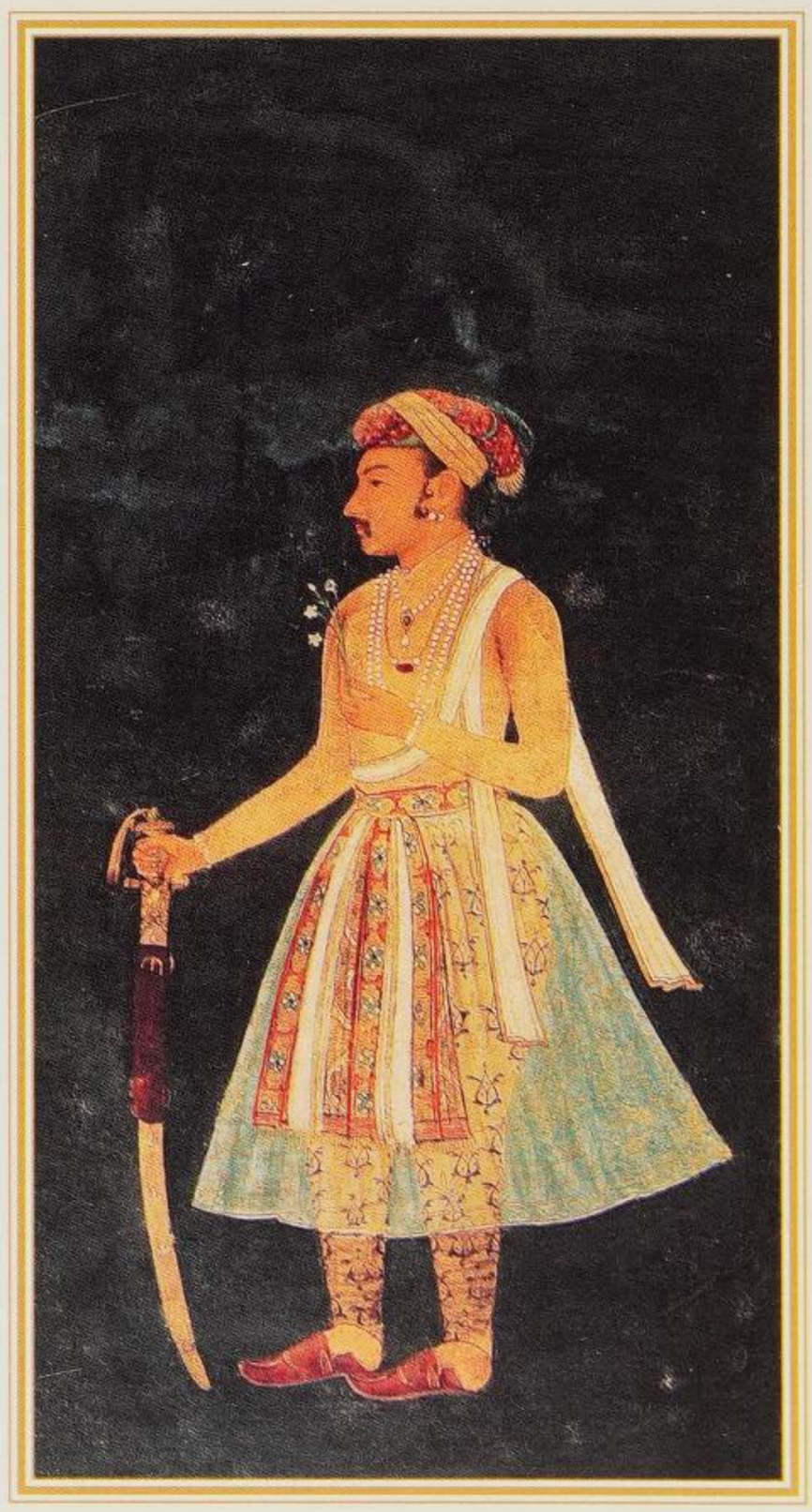
Miniature paintings depicting the life of common men are few. This painting belongs to that rare class. The main, unidentified figure in the painting is trying to win over his coy beloved and has almost succeeded. He appears to have started his persuasion by gently drawing her to him with his right hand placed over her left shoulders, and his left hand grasping her right wrist. Her resistance seems to have melted at his touch. His pleading eyes compel her to respond to his overtures by pulling him to her with her hand encircling his left arm. The artist has used the expressive eyes and the movement of the hands of the loving couple to indicate their mutual submission without resorting to any sort of embellishment. The very simplicity of the couple which elevates this common occurrence in the life of an ordinary man to thematic heights makes this painting a superb work of art.



(opposite page) DARA SHIKOH VISITS A SUFI FAQIR
Mughal, Shahjahan period, circa A.D. 1640-50
Paper, 25 x 15 cm
Acc. No. 50.14/11

The Sufi movement which arose in Persia around the 9th century came to be regarded as heretical by the orthodox under whose dictates the rulers sought to curb it and torture Sufis. It was in order to avoid the resulting persecution that several Sufis fled to India. The term Sufi is understood to be derived from the word *Suf* (wool) referring to the long woollen garments worn by Sufi ascetics. The Sufis tried to achieve a state of ecstasy through music and dance. Shahjahan's eldest son Dara Shikoh was taught by both Hindu teachers and Muslim *mullahs*. He was, therefore, interested in uniting Hinduism and Sufism. There are many extant pictures that show Dara Shikoh seated before his well-known teachers, Mian Mir and Mullah Shah. The former was so revered by all sects that he was invited to lay the foundation stone of the Golden temple at Amritsar, Punjab.

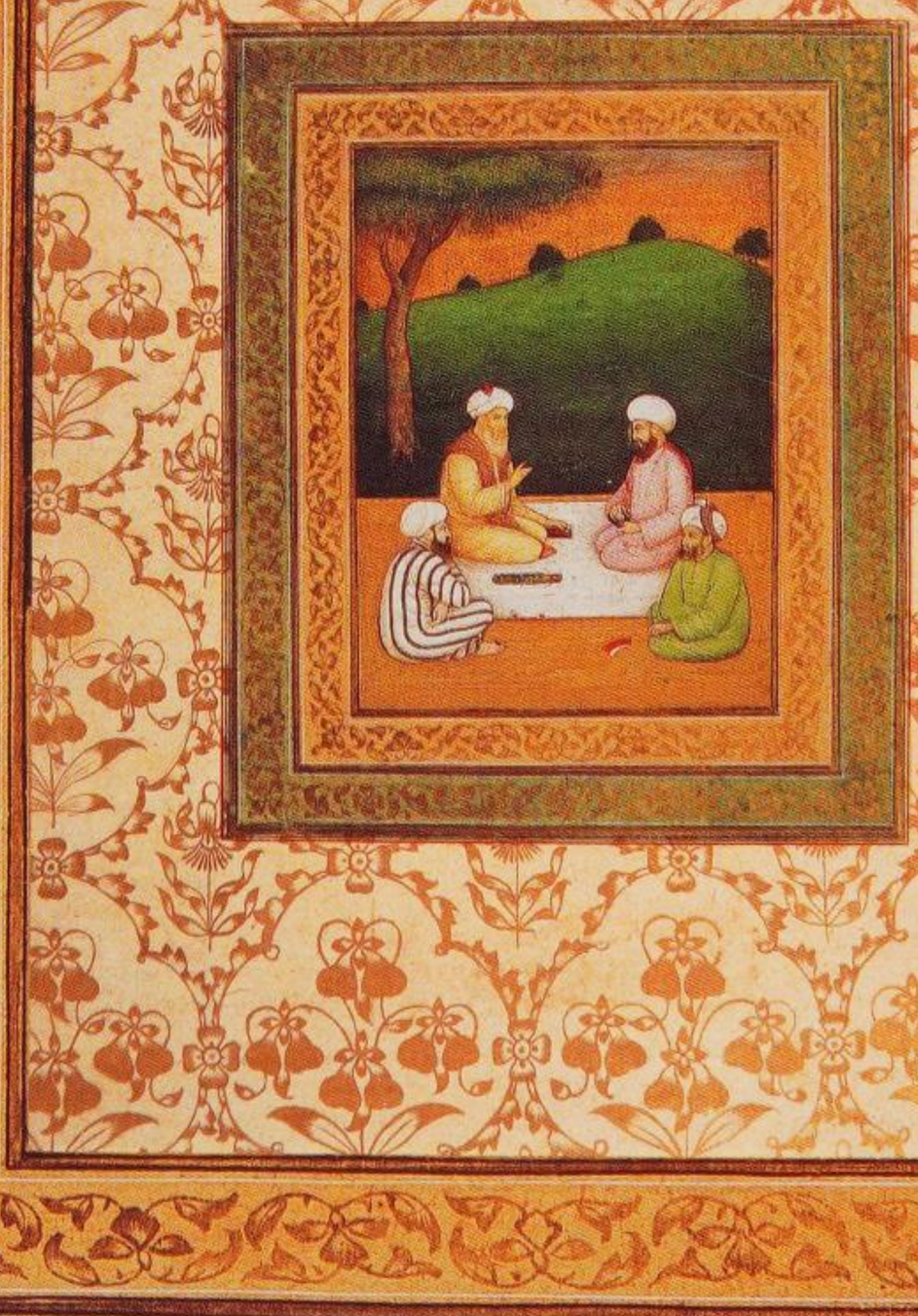
This picture shows young Dara Shikoh seated with a Sufi saint. It brings out the feeling of reverence and veneration which the Mughal prince, the heir-apparent of the Mughal empire, held for Sufis. The Sufi saint is listening to the music played by his devotee on a *sitar*-like instrument. This is another fine example of the Jahangiri *neemqalam* style which continued into the Shahjahan period as well. Here, the treatment of light colours and the delicacy of line-work is superb. The tree and the meadow, together with the prevailing calm, add emphasis to the mystic aspect of Sufism.



PORTRAIT OF SHAH SHUJA
Mughal, Shahjahan period, circa 1645-50
Paper, 15.5 x 8.5 cm
Acc. No. 48.5/13

Shah Shuja, or Sultan Shuja, the second son of Emperor Shahjahan, was born in 1616 and died in 1660. Like his other brothers, he was also defeated by his younger brother Aurangzeb in the war of succession in 1559-60.

Shah Shuja, about twenty-five in age, is shown against a dark green background, facing left. He is wearing a torq *jama* and *jari-butidar pyjama*, a red and green bound turban and holding a flower and a sword. He is wearing long strings of pearls with pendants, an embroidered *pataka* of white muslin with gold *jari* border, and maroon chappals. This painting is similar to a portrait of his father Shahjahan when of his age. The painting is in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



MEETING OF SUFIS
Mughal, Shahjahan period, circa A.D. 1640
Paper, 17 x 14 cm
Acc. No. 52.33

Four Sufi divines are seen engrossed in a philosophical discussion. It seems as if they are collectively engaged in a search of some aspect of truth, each bringing his own experience and perceptions to this gathering. The remarkably well drawn main figure of the *mullah*, or the saint, wearing a long *darvesh*-like *jama*, is seen imparting his knowledge to the other three learned ones. Serenity and mysticism characterise the atmosphere. The distinctive features of this painting are fine draughtsmanship, delicate modelling and the calmness on the faces of the learned ones. The landscape is rendered in naturalistic manner.

PORTRAIT OF MURAD BAKSH (1624-58)
Mughal, Shahjahan period, circa A.D. 1645-50
Paper, 42 x 31 cm
Acc. No. 56.59/46

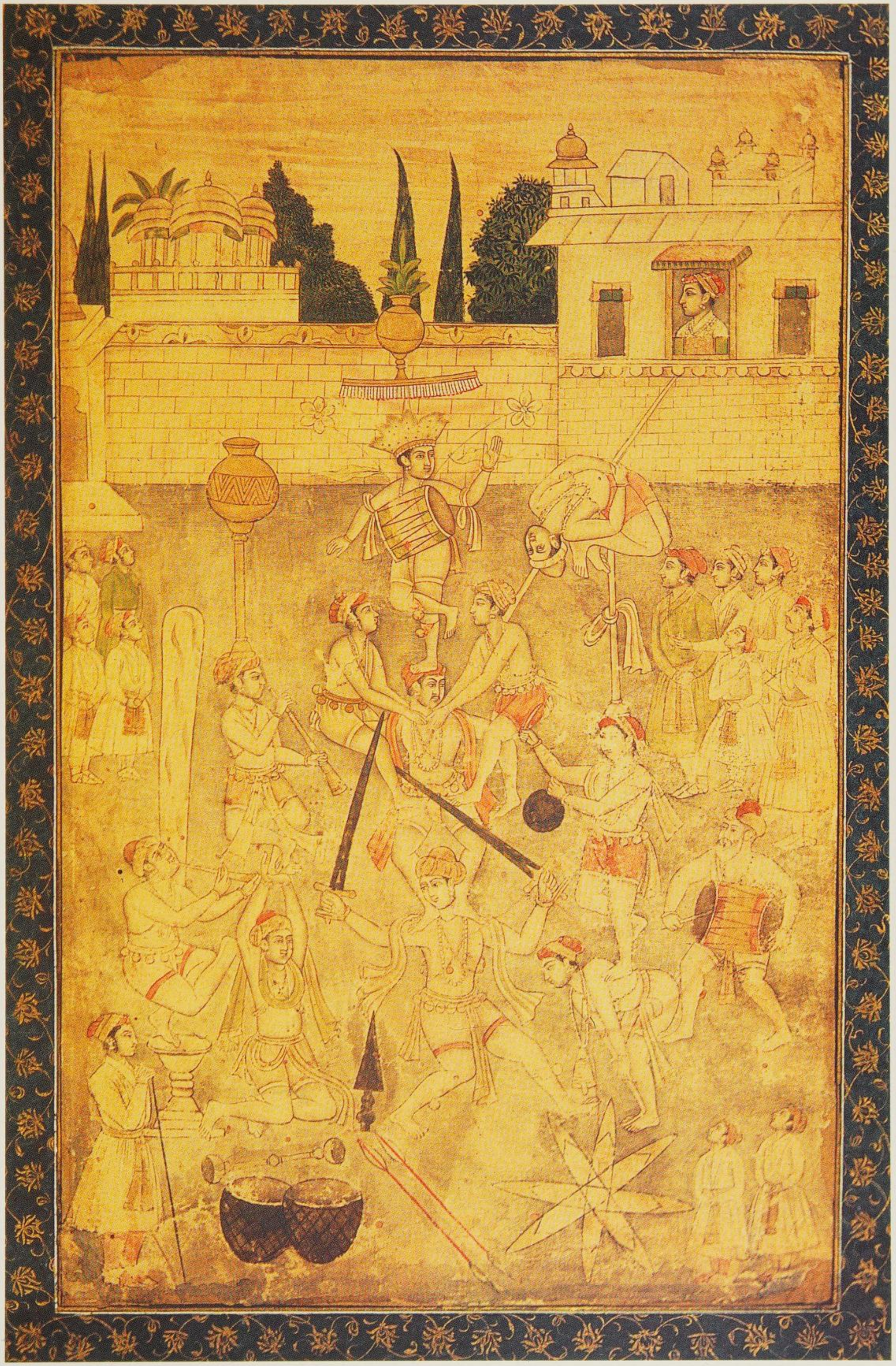
Murad Baksh, the youngest son of Shahjahan, was born at Rohtas on August 29, 1624. He held the viceroyalty of Malwa and Gujarat. He was recklessly brave, but also pleasure-loving; impetuous but inconsistent; a fine soldier but a poor commander; ambitious but lacking perseverance; in short, he never said anything unwise and never did anything wise. His great quality was his courtesy to all, whether high or low.

This painting, a portrait profile, is unique for the innovation adopted to focus attention on the prince. A narrow, plain border with an inscription and the prince's official seal, and a floral border of contrasting colours, enclose the rectangle wherein is set the circle which has a framed portrait of the prince. The circular frame has five plants around it, each with a flower, the leaves of which are rose-like, yet the flower is more like a poppy. Different colours, dull and bright, and the floral pattern, helps show the portrait in bold relief.

(opposite page) DARA SHIKOH VIEWING ACROBATICS
Mughal, Shahjahan period, circa A.D. 1640-50
Paper, 56 x 34.7 cm (with border)
Acc. No. 52.32

Dara Shikoh, the eldest son and the heir-designate of Emperor Shahjahan, though destined not to ascend the throne, had a multi-dimensional personality with his great love for all arts and sports. Like his ancestors — Akbar, Jahangir and his father Shahjahan — he patronised the writing of literature, paintings, music and various sports.

He is shown seated at a window of his palace viewing acrobatic feats. The acrobats are seen performing at their best to please the prince. The most interesting aspect of this painting is the depiction of the multifarious acrobatic activities conducted simultaneously, and yet the artist has managed to focus the attention on the principal acrobat who is supporting two others on his shoulders with another one standing on his head beating a drum, as also on the prince at the window, though the attention of the prince himself is focused on the principal acrobat. The composition is unsurpassable for its economy and telling effect.



LADY PORTRAYED WITH A BIRD
Mughal, Shahjahan period, circa A.D. 1650
Paper, 20 x 15 cm
Acc. No. 56.49/6

Painting portraits of women was a late innovation of Mughal art. The Mughals were quite restrictive about the exposure extended to the women in the *harem*. Babur, too, makes scarce mentions of women in his memoirs, except those of his blood relations — grandmother, mother, sister, paternal aunts and cousin sisters. Akbar too showed no interest in their portraiture and hardly any in themes that had ladies as principal figures except where required for illustrating texts. Knowing, perhaps, the inclination of their patron, the artists of Akbar's court, while illustrating the *Babur-nama*, included in it only five out of the total of 144 illustrations that have female figures. Even Jahangir, the great lover of art, did not favour their portraiture. The portrait of his own empress, Nurjahan, was rendered decades after him. It was only during the period of Shahjahan that their portraiture was encouraged. Dara Shikoh, his eldest son, while presenting an album of paintings to his wife, included in it a few female likenesses. Such portraiture in Persian paintings came into being much earlier. Ladies engaged in activities like drinking wine, enjoying music or writing poetry were widely portrayed in Persia much before such scenes were painted in India. It is a strange paradox that in the period of Jahangir and thereafter, though the artists of the Mughal court were in the process of weeding out elements of Persian art style, the Persian concept of painting portraits of women slipped into Mughal art. The same activities — ladies drinking wine, enjoying music etc. — came to be the themes of Mughal portraiture as well. Later, the concept also extended to Deccani paintings.

This is a portrait of an elegant young lady, obviously from the nobility, standing with a small bird, probably a *maina*, in her hand. Her charming face, expressive eyes, long hair falling on her breast, fine and delicate fingers and anatomical proportions, indicate that the person who painted her was charmed by his innovation, or by someone real before him. The lady is gracefully dressed in her *pyjama* with gold borders, diaphanous *jama* with *jari*-work, an embroidered upper gown and a *chaghatai* head-dress. Her jewellery is made of pearls, rubies and other stones. In her right hand she is holding a walking stick which probably contains inside it a secret, sword-like weapon. The portrait is magnificently drawn and brings out the beauty of the subject of the portrait.

SHAHJAHAN ON ROYAL ELEPHANT

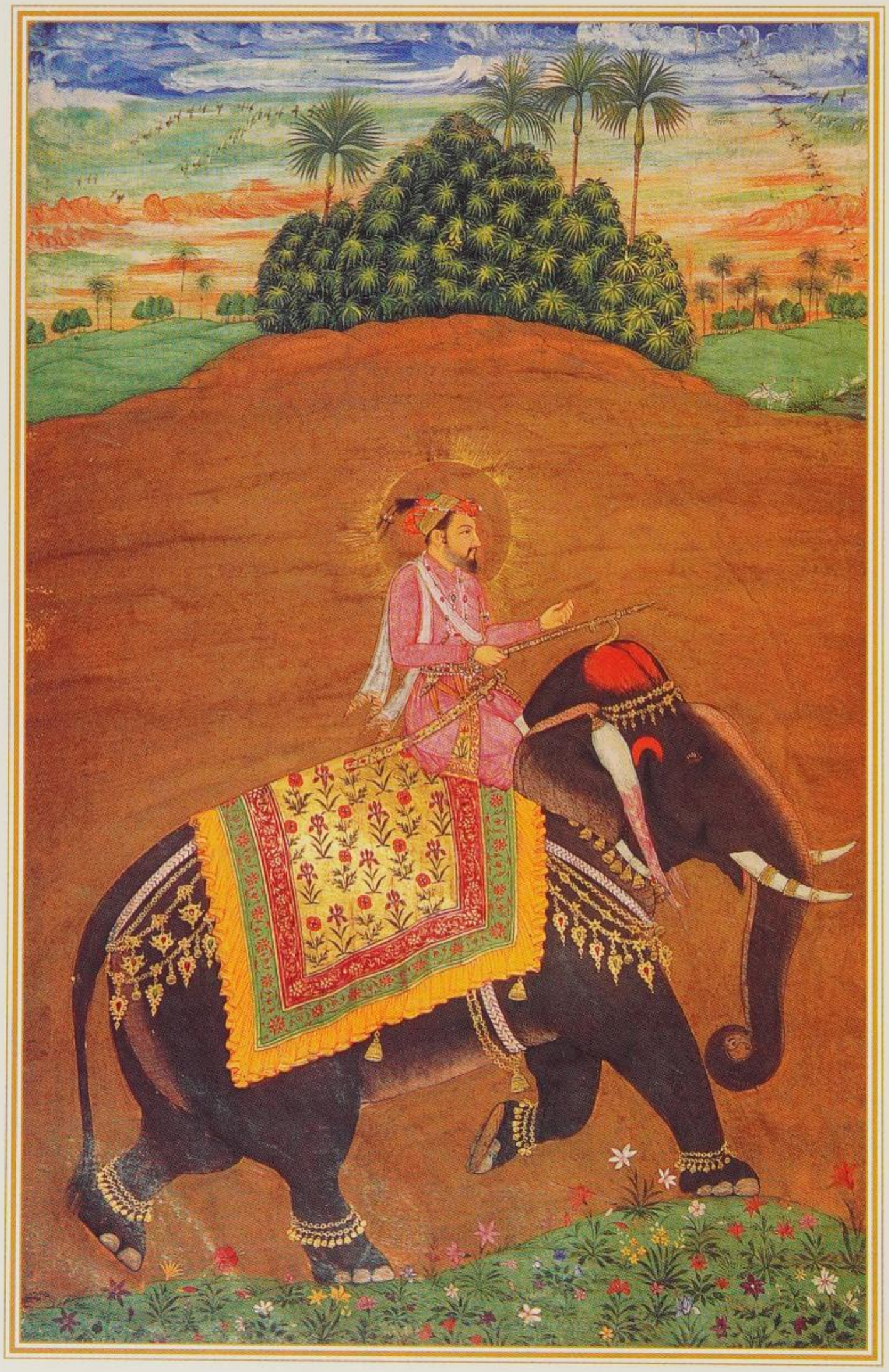
Mughal, Shahjahan period, circa A.D. 1645-50

Paper, 26.5 x 17.5 cm

Acc. No. 63.1730

Shahjahan, like his father Jahangir, patronised and encouraged painting. The artists, encouraged by the emperor's attitude, worked on paintings faster than before. By this time, the rendering of portraits had become very popular. The artists, in mutual competitiveness, portrayed their emperor in various postures and styles. The Mughals were formal and ceremonious and so all such portraits have elements of grandeur.

In this painting, Emperor Shahjahan is riding on a royal elephant holding the elephant goad. The decorated elephant is shown moving over grass. The Mughal artist has elaborated Shahjahan's royalty by way of a nimbus around his presence. Fine line work and balanced colours are the principal features of the painting. Karl Khandalavala assigned this picture to the Bikaner school because it came from Bikaner. There is no inscription on the reverse to confirm his view. If seen minutely, his statement seems to be erroneous. The prominent Mughal features in this painting which may stand any comparison with the best Mughal studies of the emperor clearly indicate that it is a painting in the Mughal style.



RANA BHIM OF MEWAR
Mughal, Shahjahan period, dated A.D. 1657, A.H. 1066
Paper, 22.5 x 14.5 cm
Acc. No. 63.1444

The perfect art of portraiture, the perfection the artists of the Mughal court had arrived at, required a person to be so portrayed that it would reveal the inner personality as well as a more popular public image. For achieving this dual goal, the artists of the Mughal court reproduced a person's resemblance faithfully as also the insignia of his office and rank. They then placed some symbol, for instance a bird, a flower, etc. to bring out the most important trait in his character.

The portrait here, of Rana Bhim Singh of Mewar, makes a slight departure; no symbol is used to reveal the main aspect of the figure's personality — his posture and facial expression are used to fulfill this function. Rana Bhim Singh of Mewar left Mewar forever after his father, Rana Raj Singh (1652-80) chose his other son Jai Singh (1680-98) to succeed him in preference over Rana Bhim Singh. This hurt Bhim Singh for there was no flaw in his character to justify this deprivation. He left Mewar vowing never to return. This strong determination and indomitable will is well brought out in this painting with his compressed lips and eyes that gaze into the distance. Also, his left hand is held in a firm grasp by his own right hand. The partly shown sword and the shield give added emphasis to the determined and strong will of the prince of Mewar. His posture and expression reveal a man of noble bearing and strength of character; the prince was neither stubborn nor whimsical. This is neatly brought out by the attitude he displays in the picture. His clothes, turban and the ornaments on his person reveal that he shunned the usual ostentation of his rank and preferred to fulfill the obligations of his office to a life of pleasure and ease. The pale green background serves its function faithfully.

LADIES ENJOYING WINE
Mughal, Shahjahan period, circa A.D. 1650-60
Paper, 39 x 26 cm
Acc. No. 60.1572

The arts, like literature, reveal to us, though in degrees that may differ from one artist to the other, the real face of concurrent society. The art of painting, particularly the miniature paintings of the feudal era, had limitations in this respect, since the artists had to paint for a feudal society under its patronage. The artist created a painting primarily to gratify his patron. If a painting, howsoever genuine and real it might have been, offended his patron, or the aristocracy in general, the artist had every chance of losing not only his patronage but also his head. Hence, the rendering of the artists of the middle ages remained largely limited to scenes of court life. However, the vices and weaknesses of the nobility are often revealed in these paintings — whether because the patrons did not consider these so, or because they were required to render a situation in which the representation of a vice became essential. The consumption of alcoholic drinks or other intoxicants by ladies has always been considered bad by Indian society. However, the ladies of the aristocracy have always resorted to it. During Jahangir's era, this became widespread. His court historian Manucci had specifically taken a note of it and dealt in detail on the prevalence of this fashion, particularly in Mughal *harems*. The artists of the Mughal era have sometimes rendered the theme of ladies consuming alcohol, as the one here, simply because the class for whom such paintings were painted saw nothing adverse in them.

In this painting, a beautiful, slim, noble lady is seen enjoying wine on her palace terrace attended by her maids, a few of whom are playing music for her. One is offering her a cup of wine while another is pouring wine into a cup from a wine jar. The lady standing behind her with a staff indicates her rank. The painting forms an important source for the study of the Mughal *harem* in particular, and of aristocracy in general.

بپرس از من دگر مشتاب گشتم
ز رفتم نام چاه آب گشتم

بخرخش آنچنان دلخواه می‌گشت
فلک گرد سر ان چاه می‌گشت

ز آب او حیات جان و من جست
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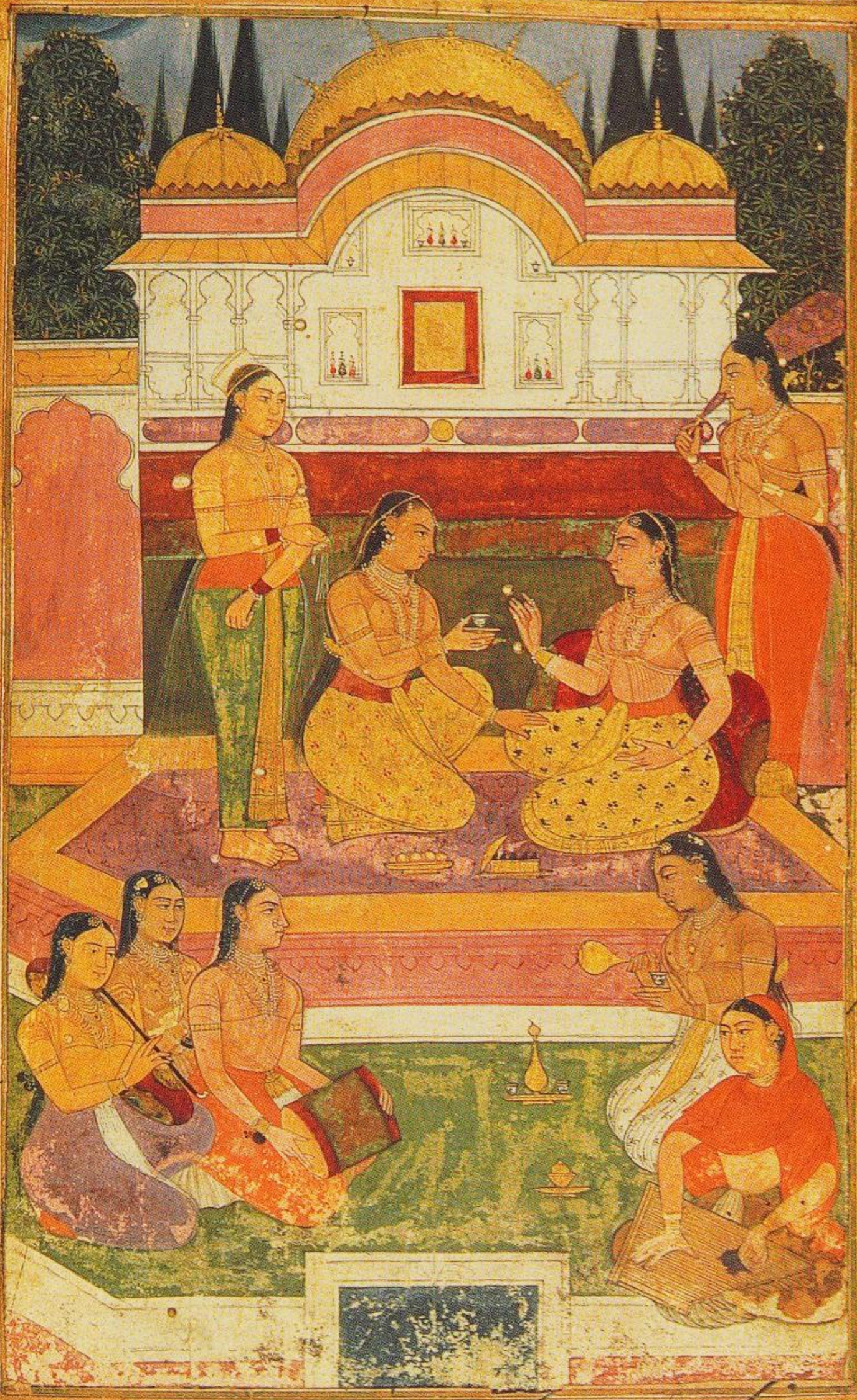

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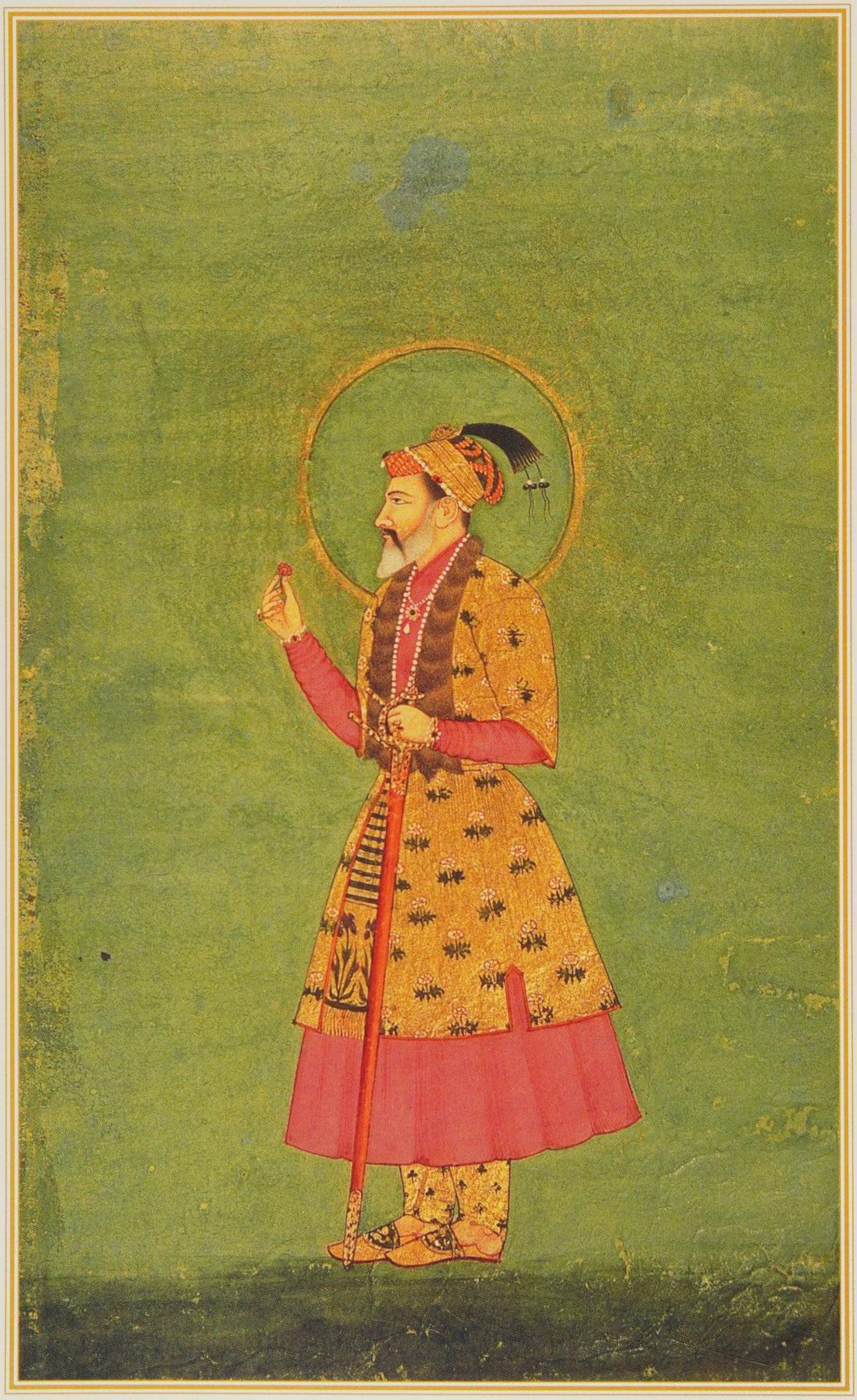


PORTRAIT OF SHAHJAHAN
Mughal, circa A.D. 1675-80
Paper, 26.5 x 19 cm
Acc. No. 60.978

Shahjahan, though his reign lasted for three decades, is not as known for his kingly qualities as for his love for art and architecture, his romantic nature and as the builder of the Taj Mahal in the memory of his beloved empress, Mumtaz Mahal, who died in 1631, just three years after his ascent to the throne. Shahjahan's life was marked by a series of personal tragedies and official disasters culminating in the final humiliation of his confinement in the fort of Agra by his own son, Aurangzeb. The bitter pangs were soothed to some extent by his eldest daughter, Jahanara, who shared with him all adversities of life. Though Shahjahan is famous for his architectural activities, the art of painting also achieved a new delicacy and romantic fervour during his period. A large number of portraits of Shahjahan have survived.

The painter in this portrait has painted him as he appeared at the close of his reign. The rich clothing of the long, mauve *jama* with a short printed fur coat, the turban bedecked with rubies and *sarpech*, the strings of pearls and precious stones show that the emperor was extremely fond of ornamentation. He is shown holding a flower in the right hand and the hilt of a long sword in the left. The portrait is so stylised that his personality is somewhat less aptly revealed.

PORTRAIT OF BABUR
Mughal, Shahjahan period, circa A.D. 1650-60
Paper, 16 x 13.5 cm
Acc. No. 51.218/8

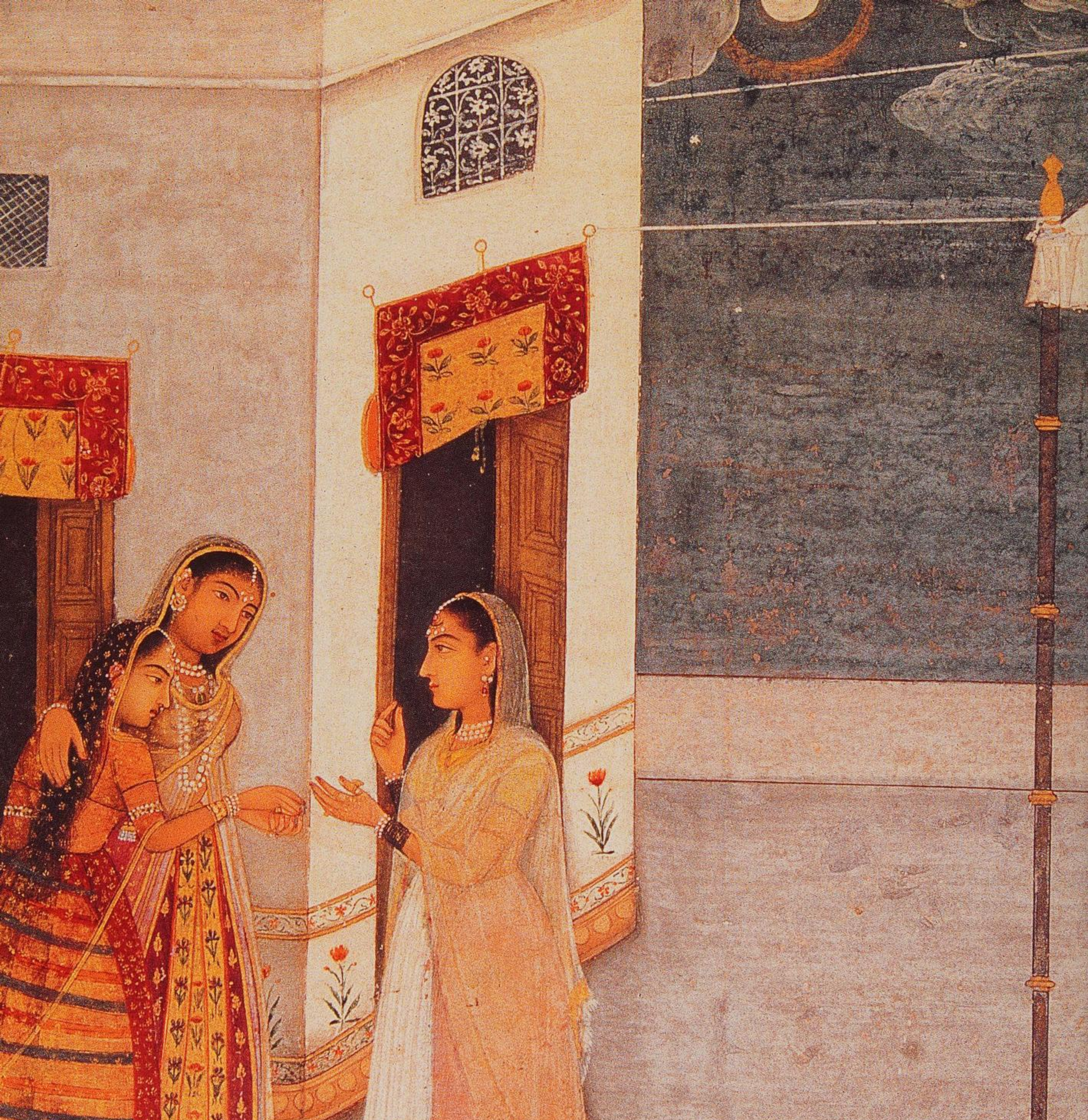
Babur, the founder of the Mughal empire on Indian soil, was a great soldier and an equally great adventurer who is said to have spent almost his entire life on horse-back. He is considered one of the most romantic and interesting personalities of his time. This busy soldier, however, was a gifted writer and a great lover of nature.

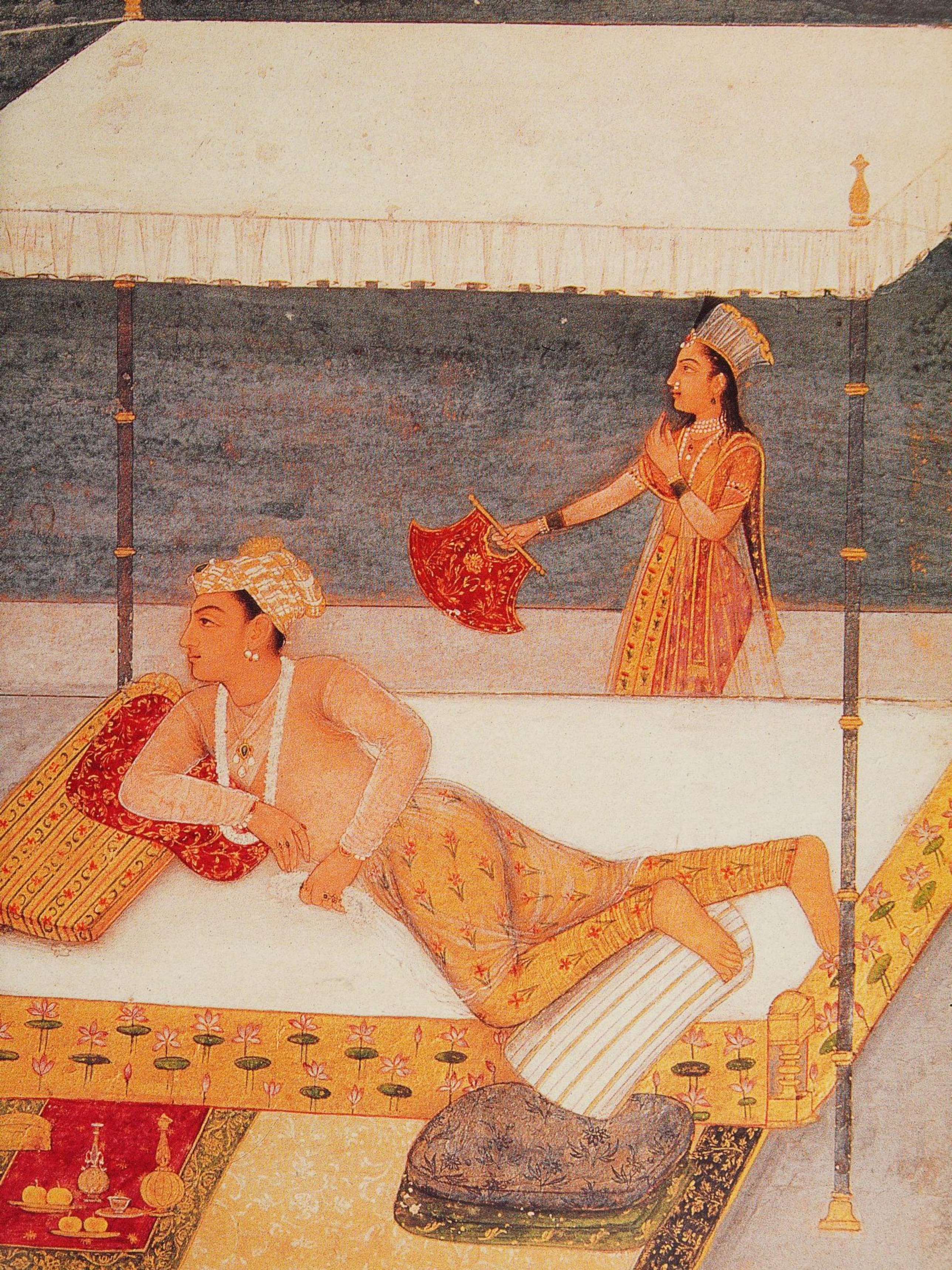
This fine portrait of Babur painted probably during the reign of his great-grandson Shahjahan, does full justice to his personality. The artist has symbolised his qualities as a soldier and adventurer through his sword, and his literary contribution by the book before and a pen-case *(qalam-dan)* beside him. The artist has taken care to portray him in a background entirely unlike the Mughal court of Shahjahan's period. Elements of grandeur are excluded. The carpet he is seated on is unlike one's perception of what an emperor would use. The long blue *jama* which he is wearing is simple and so is his *chaghatai* turban. However, his thoughtful, meditative face and expressive eyes reveal that the man behind them was not only a soldier who lived by his sword, but also a deep thinker.

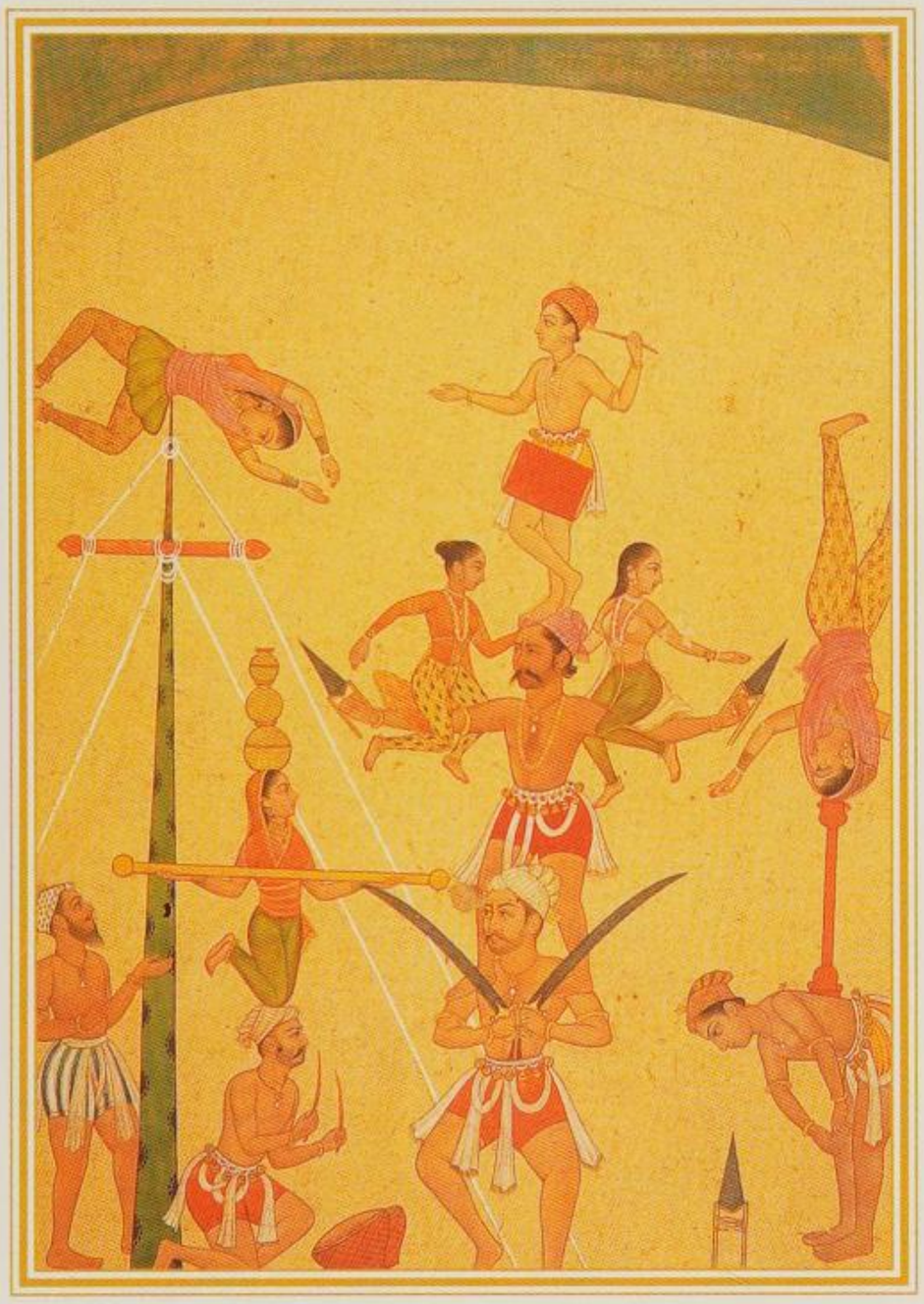
(following page) A YOUNG LADY BROUGHT TO THE HAREM
Mughal, end of the 17th century
Paper, 28 x 29 cm
Acc. No. 79.195

It was a practice in feudal India that young ladies were used for satisfying the lust of their feudal lords. Traditionally, the more mature ladies persuaded the younger ones to present themselves to the feudal lords for their gratification. Their riches, grandeur and sometimes an apprehension about their future compelled them to agree to the arrangement.

In the painting, this theme is aptly depicted. The scene is located on a moonlit terrace of a palace where, on a white, canopied bed, a restless prince aflame with passion impatiently awaits his new paramour. So restless is he that even the rays of the moon fail to soothe his ardour. An attendant tries to provide him comfort with her fan. The young lady is frightened and hesitates while approaching the prince. Two other attendants attempt to gently push her forward while another speaks softly to try and assay her fright. The wine goblets and *paandans* add verisimilitude to the drama. The interesting features of the painting are the decorative cushions, delicate colours and fine workmanship.







Acrobats
Mughal, late 17th century
Paper, 29 x 20.5 cm
Acc. No. 51.57

Acrobats performing at street corners form a familiar scene in India even today. During the Mughal period, the acrobats were comparatively better off, as attested here by their clothes and ornaments.

In this painting in the late Mughal style, eleven performers are showing their skill. In the centre, one man is holding two swords while another is standing on his shoulder. He is carrying two ladies on his arms and holding two daggers in his hands. On his head, a young boy is dancing and beating the drum. On the right side of the main acrobat, a lady performer perched on a drummer's head is holding a stick and balancing three pots on her head. Another lady is balancing herself on the sharp edge of a pole in the sky. Yet another woman acrobat is balancing herself on a wooden stand with a narrow circular base supported by a bent man. Two daggers, one in front and the other at the rear, are placed to enhance the appeal of the act by increasing the danger to the woman performer. Using light colours on a plain background, this painting shows the transition between the imperial Mughal style and the coming of the late Mughal style. The broad and narrow alternating floral borders have elevated this vignette of a common scene into a work of art.

Dara Shikoh and his beloved Rana-Dil
Mughal, late 17th century
Paper, 34 x 26 cm
Acc. No. 58.27/16

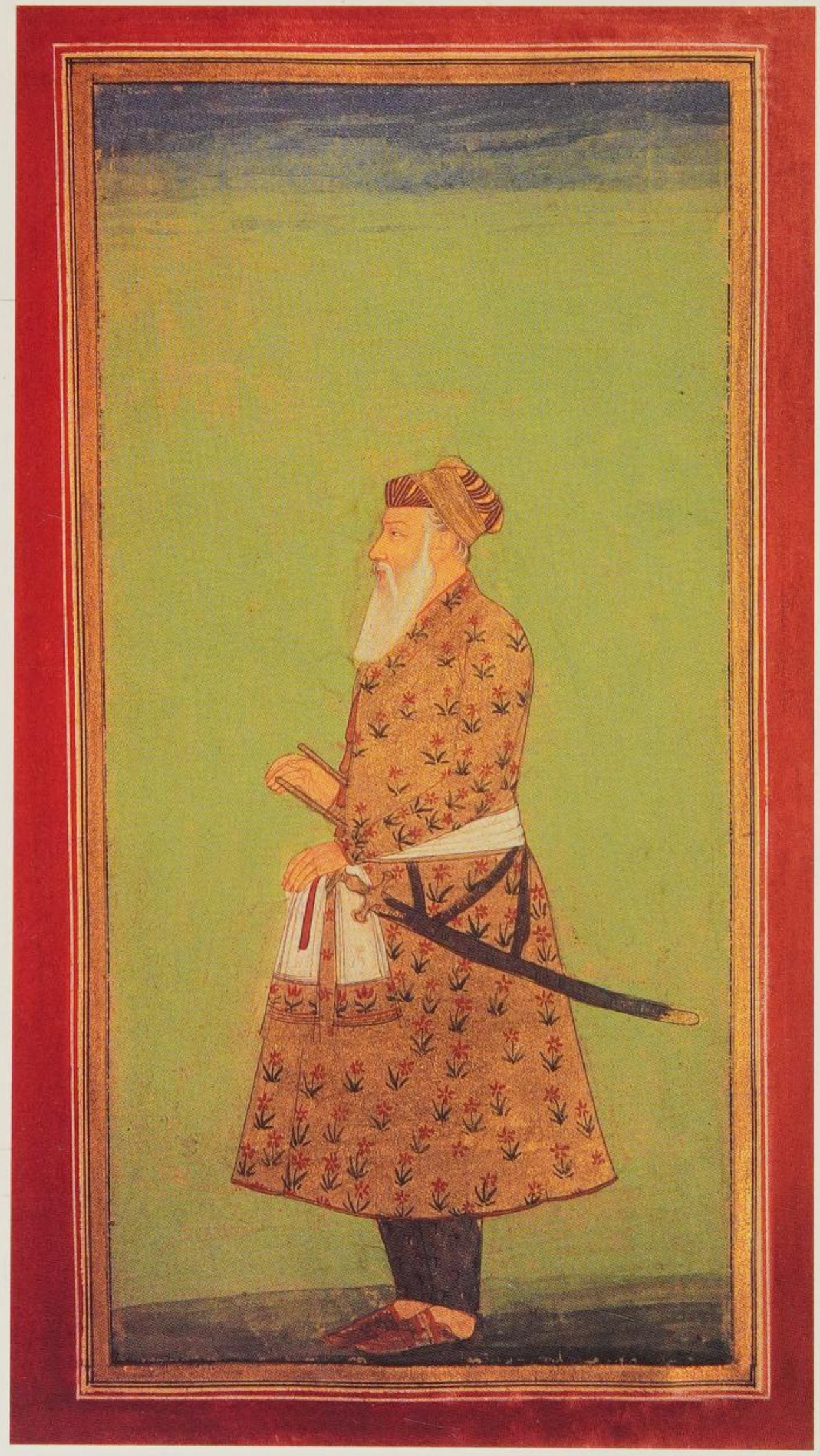
The Mughal princes were often apprehensive about their fate for inheritance after the emperor's death usually unleashed a bitter war of succession. In such matters, the army played a decisive role, as did the *mullahs* and *maulavis* who were required to read the *Khutaba* for the acclamation of the new emperor. Death, almost always, befell all others. Dara Shikoh knew his younger brother, Aurangzeb, was ambitious and unhappy about his assignment away from the capital. Though Shahjahan had declared Dara Shikoh the prince-regent, there was no way to enforce this decision. Temperamentally, Dara Shikoh had Sufi leanings which the conservative *mullahs* and *maulavis* did not favour. They also disliked his love for art, music and poetry considering them against the canons of Islam. Their preference was Aurangzeb who tended to be conservative. In such circumstances Dara Shikoh remained under constant pressure, but had no one in his family with whom he could discuss his plight. Perhaps this compelled him to share his deepest thoughts and discuss the political situation with his beloved Rana-Dil when he visited her in the *harem*. For above all, the lady was wise and devoted to the prince. Since the artists looked upto him for his patronage of art, it is possible one of them painted this tryst.

The painting shows the prince discussing some point with his beloved. In the Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum in Jaipur, there is a similar painting from an earlier date. Though the present painting is not inscribed, yet modelled on the same lines, it seems definitely to be a later version of the same painting from Jaipur. The painting is powerfully drawn. The formal treatment of the lovers is marked by a difference from earlier Mughal paintings, with figures rendered more naturally in an intimate atmosphere. The sensitive modelling of the main figures and the elegance of line suggest that this preparatory sketch was done by an accomplished court painter. Rana-Dil is shown wearing light, cool, transparent garments. Five ladies in waiting hold a fly-whisk, wine jar and refreshments, and the lady musician with her two accompanists provide a glimpse of life in a Mughal princess' *harem*.

PORTRAIT OF SHAHNAWAJ KHAN
Mughal, circa A.D. 1700
Paper, 29.5 x 18.5 cm
Acc. No. 57.88/29

Shahnawaj Khan was the son of Mirza Rustam Safawi. His original name was Mirza Badi-al-Zaman. He participated in the war of succession between Shahjahan and his brothers and fought valiantly for the cause of Shahjahan. The emperor rewarded him for his services and commended him for his loyalty with the title of Shahnawaz Khan. Later, in 1637, he married his daughter Dilrus Banu to Aurangzeb with customary pomp.

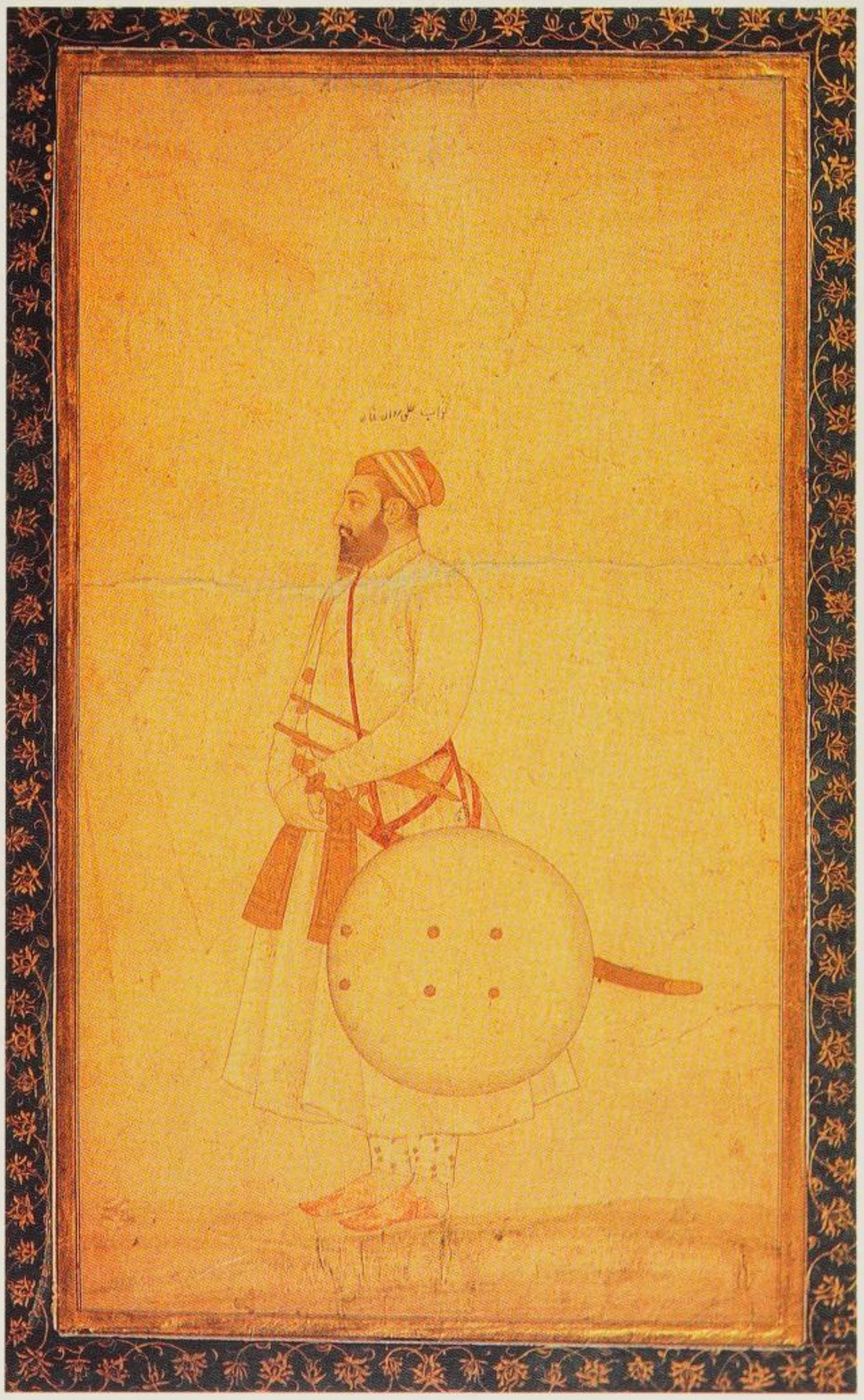
The white, long-bearded portrait of Shahnawaz Khan is painted against a green background with a red border. He is shown wearing a dark red turban with golden streaks, a golden embroidered *jama* and white *pataka* with a similar golden border. It is an impressive study from the late Mughal period.



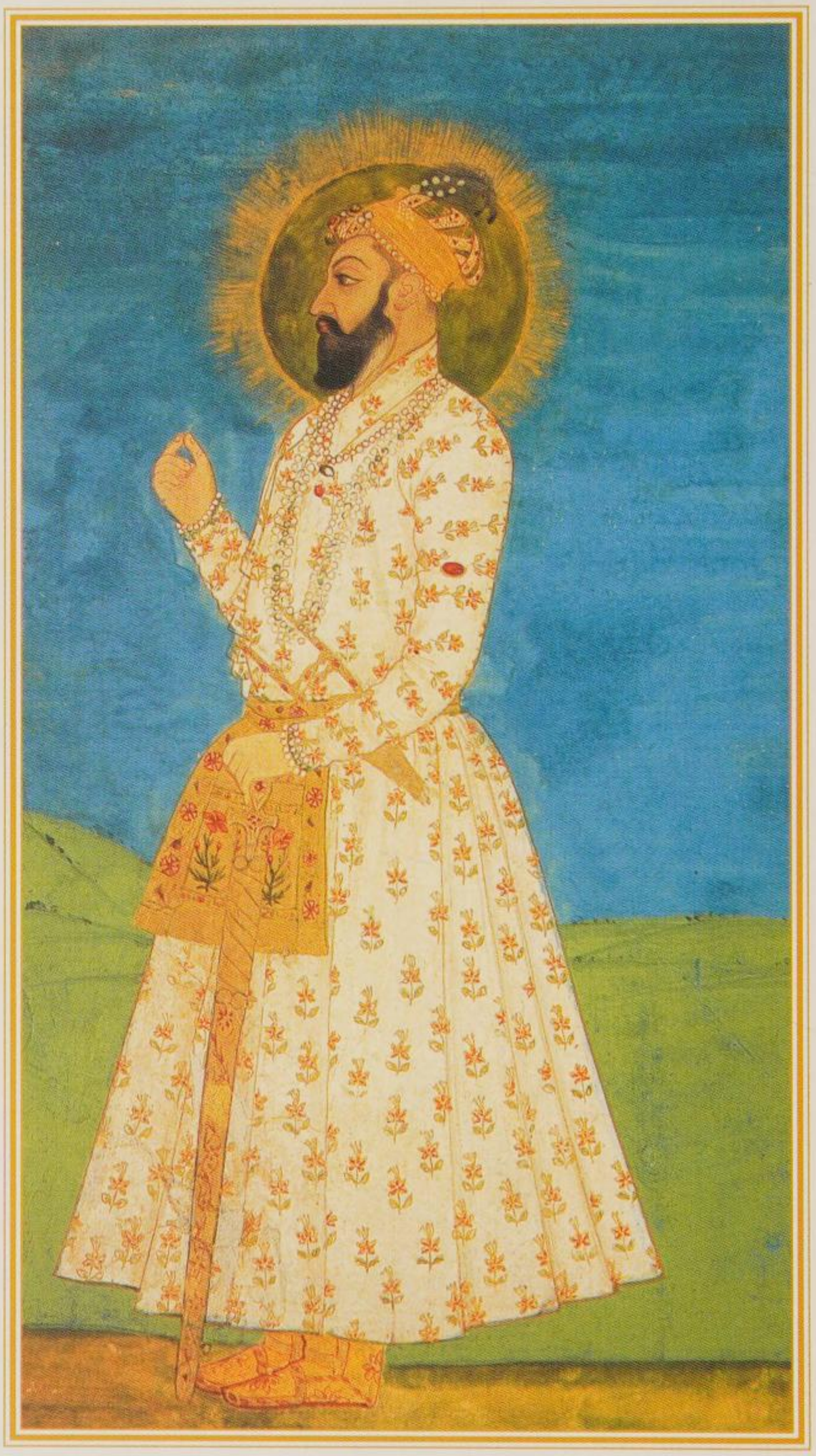
PORTRAIT OF NAWAB ALI MARDAN KHAN
Mughal, circa A.D. 1700
Paper, 55 x 34.5 cm
Acc. No. 52.31

Amir-ul-Umra Ali Mardan Khan was appointed the governor of Kashmir by Shahjahan. He helped the imperial army under Prince Murad Baksh in the subjugation of Balkh in 1646. Later, he looked after the political affairs of Kabul and Balkh. He was considered an able and good general and was a noble of the highest dignity who held a *mansab* of 7,000 soldiers. His death had caused great grief to Shahjahan.

In this portrait in the late Mughal style, the powerful personality of Ali Mardan Khan is painted in light colours. He is shown adorned with a long *jama*, a printed *pyjama* and a beautifully embroidered *pataka* on the waist, sword, shield and *jamadhar* (dagger). His name is written on the top of his portrait. His posture is significant with hands lightly crossed and held against the waist as if in respectful attendance upon the emperor.



PORTRAIT OF BAHADUR SHAH I
Mughal, circa A.D. 1710-15
Paper, 32.5 x 23 cm
Acc. No. 60.1166



After the death of his father Aurangzeb in 1707, the sixty-three-year-old Prince Muazzam crowned himself emperor as Bahadur Shah. Because of the policies initiated by Aurangzeb, he inherited a kingdom that had begun to disintegrate. It is said that during the five years of his reign, he spent almost four-and-a-half years in battlefields because of the war of succession that broke out, a Rajput rebellion and for settling terms of peace with his brother Kam Baksh who was then the viceroy of the Deccan, and finally because of the revolt of the Sikhs in the Punjab. He died at the age of sixty-nine in 1712. He had little time to make a mark either as an emperor or as a patron of arts.

On a blue background, Bahadur Shah I is shown in a long white *butidar jama* embroidered with golden and red coloured flowers in Aurangzeb's style. He is wearing a golden *pataka*, *pyjama* and *chappals*. He holds a flower in his right hand and a sword in his left. The halo around his head is painted in gold, with rays around it. The name of the emperor on top of the picture in Devnagri script seems to be a late addition.

(preceding page) THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST
Mughal, Early 18th century
Paper, 38 x 23 cm
Acc. No. 52.42

The British visited India several times before Jahangir's ascendancy, but it was during his reign that they began to grasp India's economy and polity and intrude into her social and cultural life and in her art. After the British succeeded in establishing friendly relations with the Mughal emperor who reciprocated their moves, the artists began to paint themes that received appreciation from the imperial guests whose opinion even the emperor valued. Besides, they brought for the emperor, paintings from Europe, especially of Albrecht Durer's Madonna and Christ. This had a definite impact on the minds of Jahangir's court artists. As a result, while rendering their own themes they could not escape the European influence on their paintings, and so also tried to render Christian themes.

This painting depicts the popular nativity of Christ. The theme is rendered with the traditional serenity of the occasion and as per details associated with the event. However, the court artist has set the scene in a Mughal palace, not corroborated with the traditional setting of Christ's birth. The ritual and mythological part of the painting is in almost exact adherence to the beliefs of Christianity. The touch of the late Mughal style is clearly seen in the anatomy of the figures, the grandeur of the palace and the floral designs of the carpet.

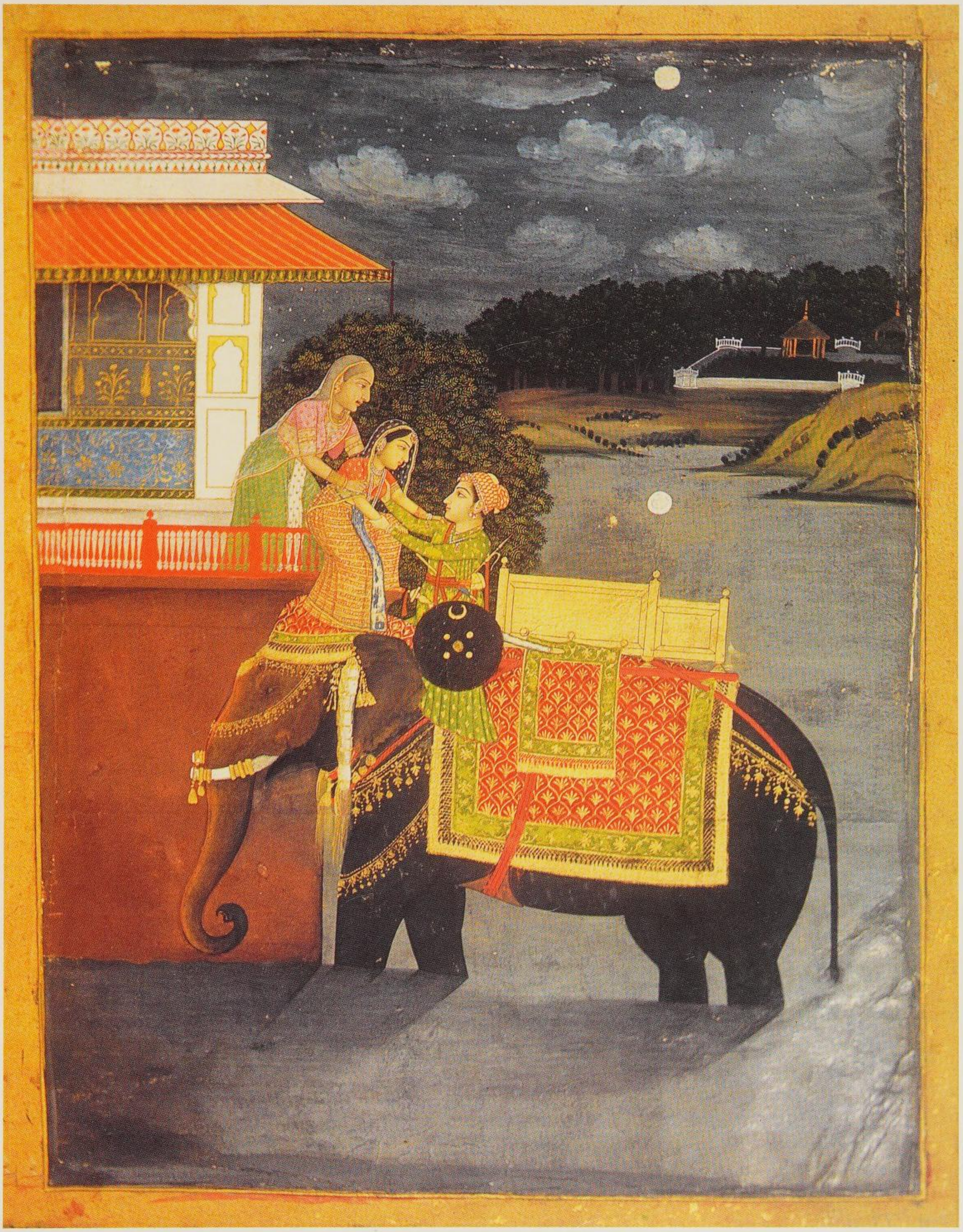
ACROBATS AND OTHER SCENES
Late Mughal, circa A.D. 1730-40
Paper, 49.5 x 30.5 cm
Acc. No. 65.309

The painting is crowded with a number of scenes. Interestingly, the scene of activities is located on the banks of a river flowing close to the grove of a palace. Above, two ladies are on a swing and another two are helping to set the swing in motion. A man standing behind the thick green trees is watching the women swimming in the river, obviously as they are semi-nude. An interesting scene is of the *ubtana*, or the herbal paste being applied to a lady who is sitting on a big round chair and is helped by a maid who is cleaning her feet. The acrobatic performers are balancing earthen pots on their heads while walking on a tightrope. On the river bank, a royal couple attended by maids are witnessing the acrobatic performances. They are enjoying such pastimes as swinging, dancing and music. The painting belongs to the period of Muhammad Shah when the revived Mughal paintings achieved a certain refinement. Apart from its artistic quality, the painting is an interesting record of contemporary life.

ELOPEMENT
Late Mughal, circa A.D. 1740
Paper, 41 x 29 cm
Acc. No. 58.58/28

Vatsayayana wrote in the third chapter of his book *Kama-sutra* that if a man feared refusal from the parents of his beloved, he must then meet her secretly and persuade her to elope with him and marry her according to the *gandharva* rites.

This painting is based on the theme of elopement. The lover has brought his elephant appropriately decorated with jewellery and a red printed *chaddar* through a lake to an unguarded part of the palace where his beloved awaits him. Helped by her maid and her lover, she manages to land on the head of the elephant to reach the *howdah*. The tranquil moonlit night, the still waters of the river, the reflection of the moon in the river waters, the fortified pavilion and the dense forest in the distant background make this painting memorable. The painting belongs to the period of Muhammad Shah when the renewed interest in the art of paintings depicted scenes of dance and drinking parties in the gardens, those of *harems*, erotic paintings and scenes of sensuous palace life.



PORTRAIT OF NURJAHAN
Late Mughal, circa A.D. 1740-50
Paper, 32.5 x 23.5 cm
Acc. No. 60.1720

Dr. Beni Prashad in his book, *History of Jahangir*, wrote about Nurjahan: "No gift of nature seemed to be wanting to her. Beautiful with the rich beauty of Persia, her soft features were lightened up with a sprightly vivacity and superb loveliness." Nurjahan was the daughter of Mirza Ghiyas Beg. She was married to Sher Afkan who died in an encounter in 1607. Thereafter, she married Emperor Jahangir in May 1611. Jahangir gave her the title of Nur Mahal or the Light of the Palace at the time of their marriage. After five years he bestowed upon her the title of Nurjahan, or the Light of the World. Nurjahan was talented, cultured and intelligent. She was well-versed in Arabic and Persian, owned a rich library, patronised arts, gave stipends to students, dowries to the poor and laid out the plans of various gardens, particularly in Kashmir.

She designed two mausoleums, one for her father at Agra and another for her husband at Lahore. Like him, she was fond of painting. Nurjahan played an important role not only in the life of Jahangir but also in trade, commerce and affairs of the state.

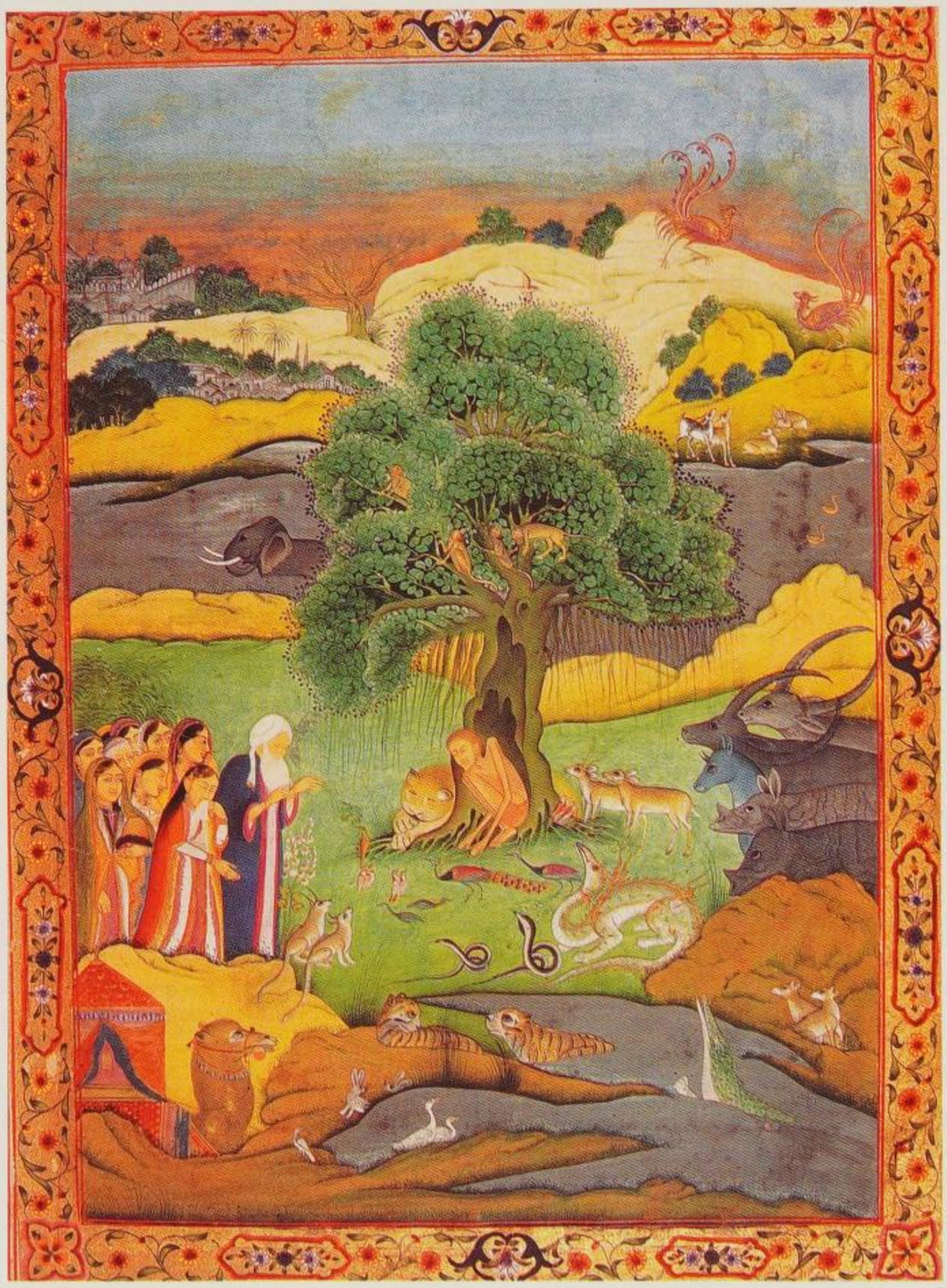
The picture, a posthumous work, may be a copy of an earlier portrait. The late Mughal artist has painted her as possessing an oval face, ample forehead and large blue eyes. He added his imaginary touches, the elegant and inconspicuous arm-band of alternating emerald and jade, the two strings of a pearl necklace and *henna* on her palms, presenting her as a paragon of beauty. Earlier, this painting was assigned to the Jaipur style but it was afterwards found from the detailed stylistic study of the portrait that it was the work of a late Mughal artist of the period of Muhammad Shah.

PRINCESS IN DESPAIR
Late Mughal, circa A.D. 1740-50
Paper, 38.5 x 31 cm
Acc. No. 57.47/1

An old proverb states that expectations breed despair and luxuries breed gloom. More than anywhere else, this applied most to the medieval *harems* of the Mughal emperors and Rajput princes. Amidst their unaccountable luxuries and material comforts, the inmates of these *harems*, whether a queen or a concubine, were usually unhappy over the neglect and prison-like bondages they had to suffer. Manucci, an Italian traveller, who was in India during the reign of Shahjahan, had occasion to be in the Mughal *harem* as a physician and observe their way of life. His account of the *harem* highlights the loneliness, pathos, neglect and perversion that the inmates are made to suffer amidst luxuries and riches.

This painting depicts a melancholic princess in a *harem* lying on a soft and luxurious bed that only adds to her discomfort. Placed on the terrace, even the cool breezes that fan it fail to soothe her. For though the sad, depressed maiden lies there in her physical state, her thoughts are elsewhere. She is entirely indifferent to what her maids and her companion are doing. She is not responding even to their touch on her. Massaging, waving a fan, sprinkling cool perfumes or the pleasant dialogue around her go unnoticed and unheard. Her companions know the answer to her ailments shall come from the door. The two of them are, therefore, looking expectantly towards it.

LAILA VISITING MAJNUN
Mughal, provincial, Oudh, circa A.D. 1740-50
Paper, 38 x 29.2 cm
Acc No. 61.1022



This painting is based on the famous Persian romance of Laila and Majnun. On separation from Laila, the emaciated Majnun looks like a skeleton. He is seated under a huge tree in the midst of wild animals by the side of a river. Laila, accompanied by her female companions and an old *maullana*, is there to meet him. She covers her face with a scarf, so that her sobs do not betray the grief in her heart over Majnun's condition. Majnun, unable to obtain Laila, pines away in the desert where wild animals — lions, alligators, deer, elephants, dragons, rhinoceroses, *neelgai*, peacocks and other birds surround him with an intuitive feeling for his pain, even though they cannot do anything except express their helplessness with their eyes. This popular subject has been taken from the *Khamsa* of the 12th century Persian poet, Nizami. The theme was painted earlier by several Mughal artists and later copied by Rajasthani and Deccani painters too. In this picture, though the theme is the same, the treatment of the composition is different. The Mughal artist painted this subject with minute details. An elephant is shown swimming in the river and a lion is sleeping near the huge trunk of the tree. The sorrowful animals help not only in focusing attention on Majnun but also in heightening the poignancy of the scene.

THE MARRIAGE PROCESSION OF DARA SHIKOH
Oudh, provincial Mughal, circa A.D. 1740-50
Paper, 43 x 32 cm, Artist: Haji Madani
Acc. No. 58.58/38

Dara Shikoh (1615-1659), the eldest son of Emperor Shahjahan, designated heir-apparent, was married to Nadira Begam in 1633. Jahanara Begam, the elder sister of Dara Shikoh, took special care of the marriage ceremonies as desired by her deceased mother, Mumtaz Mahal. Of the total expense of thirty-two lakh rupees, Jahanara alone contributed sixteen lakh. The *sachaq* (the first gifts with the auspicious red costume for the bride) worth two lakh rupees were sent to the bride. Following the death of Mumtaz Mahal, Emperor Shahjahan appeared for the first time for the *henna-bandi* ceremony at the *Diwan-e-Khas* and tied the same *sehra* (bridegroom's crown) on Dara's head as had been tied on his head by his father, Jahangir.

This magnificent painting shows the elaborate marriage procession with Dara Shikoh mounted on a brown stallion with the traditional sehra and accompanied by his father, Shahjahan (with nimbus) on white horse. The reception of the *barat* is accompanied by music, dance, gifts and fireworks. Of special note are the various types of fireworks, a skill which remain a specialty of Muslim artisans even today. The artist has successfully created the glamour of the royal court and the atmosphere of a marriage procession with all the pomp and show of the Mughal era. A similar painting was published by Dr. B.N. Goswamy and Dr. Eberhard Fisher in their book *Wonders of a Golden Age*, 1987, pl. No. 104, from a private collection.

ZULAYKHA BIDDING FOR YUSUF
Mughal, Muhammad Shah period, circa A.D. 1740-50
Paper, 50 x 30 cm, Artist: Faqir-Ullah
Acc. No. 58.58/34

The handsome Yusuf becomes a victim of the bitter jealousy of his brothers who throw him into a well. Though he is rescued, misfortune awaits him in the guise of a slave merchant who takes him to Egypt for sale. The news of his good looks spreads fast and many nobles show their keenness in buying him. The slave merchant realises that Yusuf's handsome looks may fetch him a considerable sum. He, hence, keeps postponing the sale. Meanwhile, the princess too hears of him and along with her maids, she visits the slave market where, seeing him, she too is entranced.

It is this moment which is wonderfully rendered in the painting. Yusuf stands on a hillock-like rostrum built just in front of the place where Zulaykha, beautifully adorned, is sitting on a carpet. The nimbus around her face adds to her serenity. An old lady bargains for Yusuf on her behalf. Though being auctioned, Yusuf is also in regal costume. He is wearing an orange *jama* with golden flowers on it and a brocade coat over it. His head-dress is richly adorned with gold and costly jewels. He too has a halo around him. The artist may have painted him in regal costume out of respect for his princely position, or perhaps because the slave merchant has assessed that he could fetch a better price if presented in rich clothes and jewels. As regards perspective and minute details, the painting is superbly drawn. The army with all its sections and departments parading in the background and camping, is something the viewer can best see with a magnifying glass, even though created by an artist's brush. The painting has three horizontal sections with each one carefully drawn. The middle portion relates to the main theme. The lower portion depicts various activities related to trading and marketing.

The landscape is used for a dimensional effect and there isn't a single face without some expression on it. The lavish use of gold, mauve and bluish green is noteworthy. The painting is pasted on a golden border of intricate workmanship.

(following page) HUMILIATION IN THE HAREM
Mughal, Muhammad Shah period, circa A.D. 1740-50
Paper, 40 x 29 cm
Acc. No. 62.129

The excessive consumption of alcohol has always been an abuse among the rich and the poor, the lord and the slave, yet it has often been the destiny of many that they have been the instrument of its promotion while suffering its effects. Whether in a *harem* or toiling in a field or street, the worst sufferer of this abuse has always been a woman.

In the painting, a noble lady awaiting the arrival of her lord finds to her agony, distress and humiliation that he is brought drunk to the *harem* with his *pagri*, the symbol of his honour, trailing on the ground. Though the maids attending on her try to de-intoxicate him using traditional practices and appear as grief-stricken, yet the noble lady would perhaps have preferred their absence, as their presence only add to her humiliation. It is ironical that the noble lady is compelled to have in her *harem* a stock of alcohol, though it often distresses and humiliates her. A woman toiling in the field or in the street may afford to displease her husband by denying him liquor because she is confident that despite his annoyance he will return to her. But howsoever powerful a lady in the *harem*, she cannot afford to displease her lord by not offering him his choice drink, for he may simply stroll away to another chamber in the *harem* with one of her rivals awaiting him. Amidst grandeur and riches, *harem* lives were, perhaps, more miserable and pathetic. It appears strange how, without inviting the displeasure of some feudal lord, the artist could have painted the event with such painful reality

TWO LADIES IN A GARDEN
Late Mughal, mid-18th century
Paper, 38 x 28 cm
Acc. No. 56.45/1

The Mughals, from the time of Emperor Jahangir, would spend summer in Kashmir, the land of mountains, valleys, lakes, springs and orchards. This provided an opportunity for the royal ladies and wives of the nobility to bathe in rivers, lakes and springs and to recoup their youth and charm lost in the dry, dusty cities of Agra and Delhi, even though such scenes were not allowed to appear on canvas in early Mughal paintings.

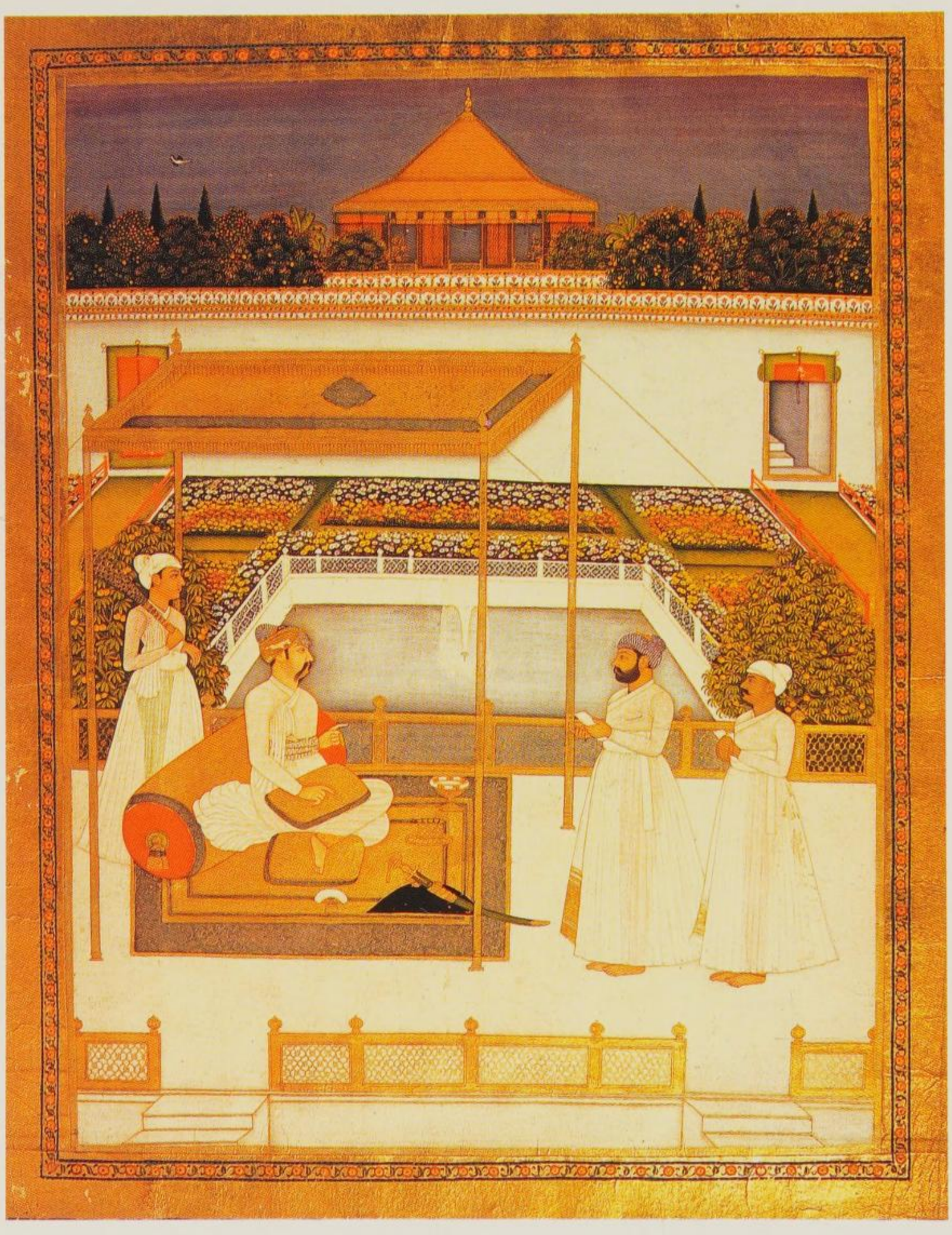
This painting depicts a lady who has finished her bath and is embellishing herself with the assistance of her maid. The fascinating beauty of the lady is further enhanced by her poise, grace and elegance of movement. Her fully clothed companion who is only a little less beautiful adds to the beauty of her mistress and of the occasion. The distant green background, the trees, and the barren middle ground reaching down, probably, to the stream and the meadow and rocks, serve as a foil to the beautiful lady. The two ladies and the surrounding landscape are framed by a border enlivened by alternating red roses and green creepers. This is further enclosed by a larger gold border punctuated by foliage painted in blue.

SULTAN IN THE GARDEN

Mughal, Provincial-Oudh, mid 18th century

Paper, 40 x 31 cm

Acc. No. 58.58/27



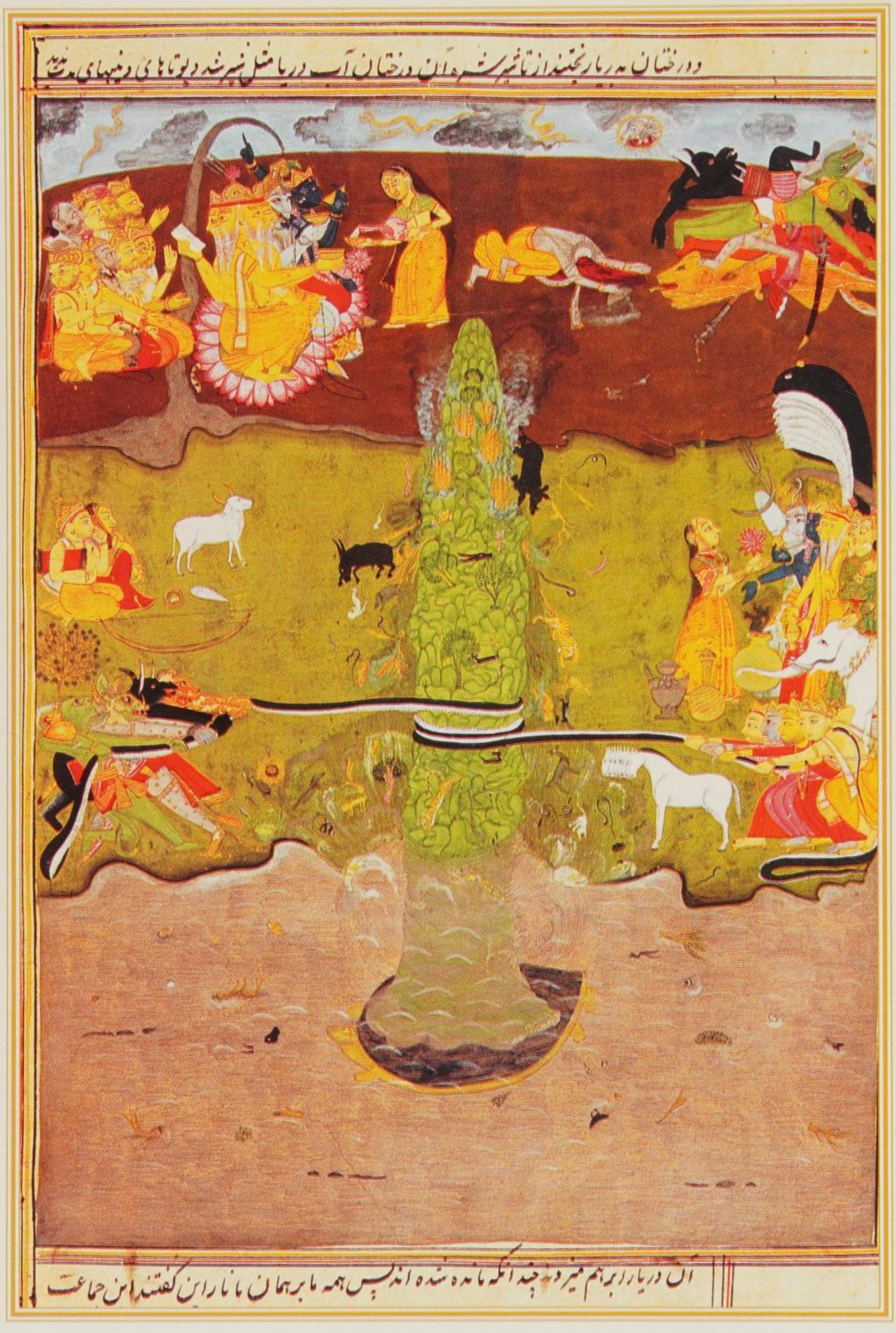
Under the patronage of the third Nawab of Lucknow (Oudh) Shuja-ud-daulah (1754-75) a delicate style of painting developed in which the artists expressed their delight in lovely gardens and palaces.

This painting is an index of the love that the Nawabs of Lucknow had for gardens and flowers. It is said about the central figure of this painting that he is Asaf-ud-daulah, the fourth Nawab of Lucknow, seated under a golden canopy in his palace garden. He has long whiskers and is dressed in a white *choga*. He built the famous Imambara of Lucknow and a mosque with a Turkish gate. He is still remembered for his liberality, splendour of court, gardens and palaces. He also was a patron of artists, especially of miniature paintings. The profuse use of gold in this painting shows the grandeur of the Oudh style.

RAZM-NAMA: CONTEST AMONGST THE PRINCES
Murshidabad, Provincial Mughal, late 18th century
Paper, 45 x 29 cm
Acc. No. 58.29/3

One of the turning points in the epic *Mahabharata* is the contest arranged by *Acharya* Drona to test the degree of skill attained by his pupils, the *Pandavas* and the *Kauravas*.

This painting illustrates an episode from the contest. The contest was held in a vast field at one end of which a pavilion was built to accommodate the members of the royal family of Dhruturastra and his courtiers. In the gallery can be spotted queen Gandhari. By her side is queen Kunti who is narrating the events of the contest to Gandhari. King Dhruturastra is seen seated on a throne near the pavilion. His minister is describing the contest to the blind king. The grandsire Bhisma is seated on the king's left. In the right hand corner of the painting, *Acharya* Drona is blessing his pupils who have come to seek his blessings for the success of the contest. In the top left corner of the painting, *Acharya* Drona is seen busy arranging the events in a manner identical to warfare in a real battlefield. Behind him prince Arjuna is seen shooting arrows. Below him, Bhima and Duryodhana are engaged in single combat with their favourite weapon, the mace. Beneath these combatants are events such as combats between horsemen, between those mounted on elephants, between chariots drawn by horses and oxen, the infantry and so on. The weapons used include bows and arrows, maces, swords and lances. The principal warriors are shown with halos. The painting is remarkable for compressing the events connected with the contest without the omission of any of the important details, in so small a space. The folio belongs to the *Razm-nama*, the Persian translation of the *Mahabharata* and seems to have been rendered at Murshidabad.



SAMUDRA-MANTHAN,
OR THE CHURNING OF THE OCEAN
Murshidabad, Provincial Mughal,
late 18th century
Paper, 46 x 29 cm
Acc. No. 58.29/2

The *Mahabharata* contains in it several myths and legends including the one relating to *Samudra-manthan*, or the churning of the ocean to extract nectar from it, the use of which would confer immortality and perpetual youth.

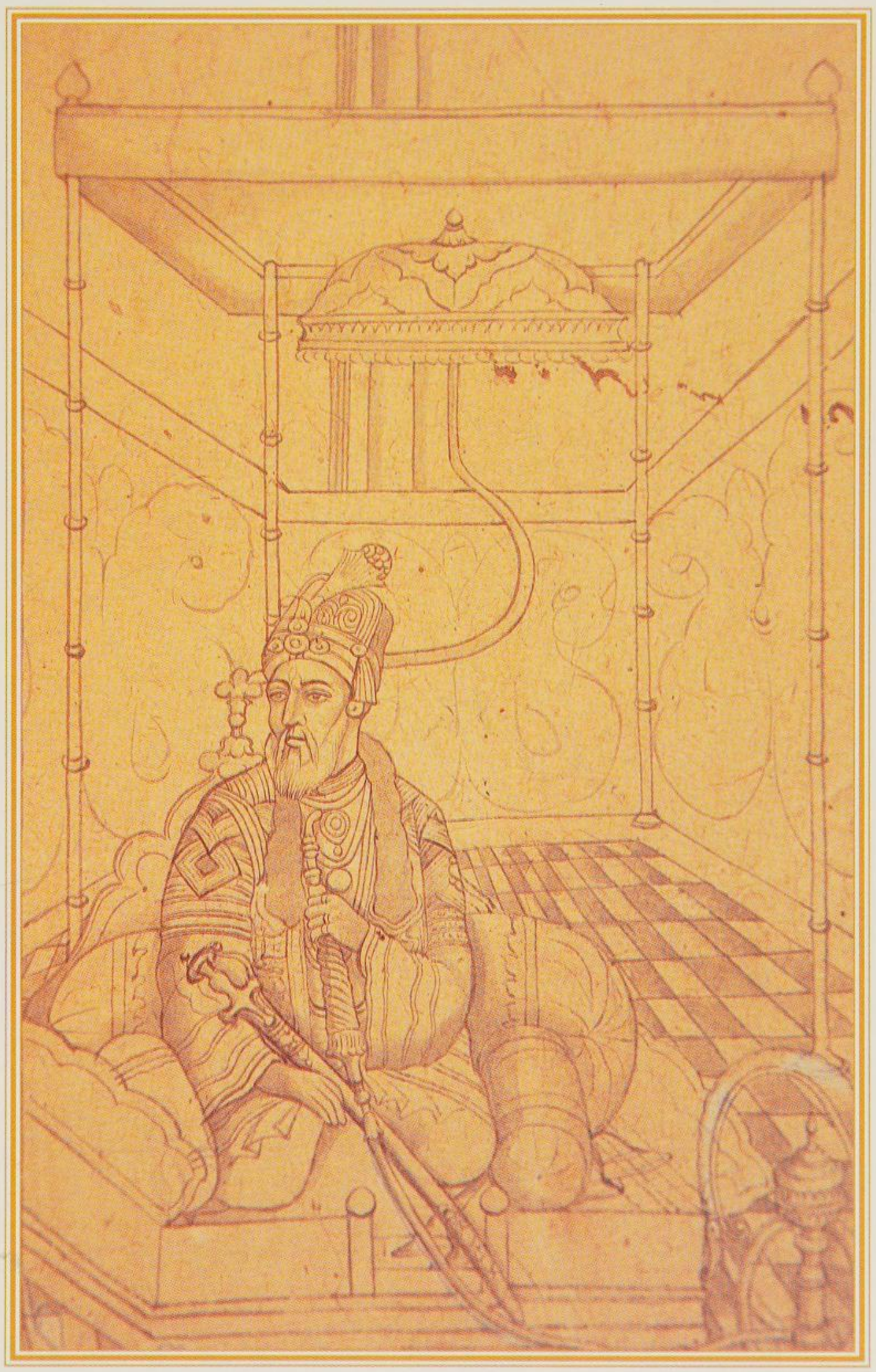
The painting depicts this Hindu legend though the artist has based it on its Persian translation, titled *Razm-nama*, or on an earlier rendering of the theme. In either case, the source of this painting is the *Razm-nama* used directly or through an earlier depiction. During his reign, Akbar had several Indian classics translated into Persian. This folio is not from the royal copy and is believed to have been painted at Murshidabad, and is a provincial work in the Mughal style. The *Suras*, the gods, and the *Asuras*, the demons, are cousins according to Indian mythology but had a very tense relationship. Both sides believed they could eliminate the other only if immortality was conferred on them. The gods, who were wiser, knew that they could attain immortality if they could somehow obtain the nectar. For guidance and help they approached Brahma, the creator of all things. Brahma took them to Vishnu, the ultimate preserver, who advised them that they should approach the demons for seeking their collaboration in churning the ocean. He advised them also to approach *Varuna*, the lord of waters, *Shesh*, the great serpent bearing the earth on its head, who is also *Ananta*, the endless, and *Mandrachala*, the poles. Vishnu assured them that he himself would assume the form of tortoise, *Kurma*, for providing the base for the act of churning. The churning of the ocean began. Vishnu, the tortoise, provided the base. *Mandrachala*, the pole, became the spindle, or the churning rod, and *Shesha*, the serpent, was used as the churning rope. The first to come out of the churned ocean was Varuna who relieved both the gods and demons, of their fatigue. Then emerged, one after the other, *seetamsu-soma* or the moon, *sura* or liquor, *Sri* or prosperity in the form of a woman, *Turanga*, the horse, *kaustubha-mani* or the celestial gem, *parijata*, the desire-fulfilling tree, and *dhooma* or smoke, followed by *kalakuta* or poison which, unless it had been annihilated by Lord Shiva, the destroyer, would have extinguished life from the universe. Shiva stored the poison in his throat which became blue. In the second round of churning came out *surbhi*, the cow, *chhatra*, the umbrella, *Aravata*, the elephant, *kundala* or the ear-rings and in the very end, the *vaidya Dhanvantri*, the innovator of medical science, holding the pot of nectar. Seeing the pot containing the nectar, the demons raised a deafening sound, fighting each other for obtaining it first. To confound them further, Vishnu assumed the form of *Mohini*, the fascinating maiden, and began distributing the nectar. The infatuated demons intensified their infighting further for the nectar and for glimpses of *Mohini*. So bewildering the demons, Vishnu gave the pot of nectar to the gods who consumed it and attained immortality.

Portrait of Bahadur Shah II

Mughal, last phase, circa A.D. 1850

Paper, 24.5 x 17.8 cm

Acc. No. 60.1244



Bahadur Shah II (1837-58), popularly known as Bahadur Shah Zafar, inherited the throne at the age of sixty-two. He was a titulary emperor under British suffrage with no armies, no strong allies and with an empty treasury. As a young man he had been a fine horseman with strength enough to draw the mightiest bows which he aimed more accurately than anyone else in Delhi. He delighted in planning gardens and buildings. Before the first war of independence against British rule, Bahadur Shah II was devoted to literature and poetry. After the suppression of the 1857 war, he was tried by the British and convicted of treason and rebellion. This deprived him of his throne, palace, pension, sons and even his motherland. He suffered poverty in his last days at Rangoon (Burma) where he died at the age of eighty-seven. With him passed away the last vestiges of the Mughal empire.

This painting shows him as a sad old man and, save for a sword, completely bereft of all grandeur associated with Mughal emperors and, perhaps, pining for a handful of dust and a few yards of land in his country to lay his coffin in.

Kitana hai badnaseeb Zafar dafen ke liye
Do gaz zamin bhi na mili kooye yar main.

DECCANI PAINTINGS

Deccan, or Deccani, denotes least of all, a region based on the geographical demarcation of the Indian subcontinent. In most contexts, the term Deccani denotes a distinctive character. Deccani art, culture, life-style, dramatics, linguistics, social values and structure, customs and costumes, rituals, religious and social commitments, the sanctity of personal life and relations, theological and philosophical innovations, thoughts and ideals, all indicate an identity, a tradition distinct from that of any other part of the country. With the greater part of its borders protected by natural frontiers formed by the ocean, the Vindhyachal mountain range which is difficult to pass through, and the Narmada river, the Deccan remained largely uninvaded and hence, peaceful for opportunities for generating a climate of creativity, enabling itself to adhere to a tradition which it could claim as its own and to a characteristic purity of its soil.

Geographically the term Deccan, or *Dakshinapatha*, is used for the whole of peninsular India lying south of the Vindhya, the Narmada separating it from the north. On a topographical basis, the main Deccan plateau is usually divided into three regions, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Tilanga-Andhra. These are said to be the three branches of the same tree. Farishta, the famous historian of medieval India, in his book *Muqaddimah* refers to India as *Hind*, and *Dakhan* as *Hind's* son who in turn has three sons, Maratha, *Kanhar* or Kannada, and *Tilang* or Tamil, among whom the land of *Dakhan* is divided. He also used the term Deccan to denote the Behmani kingdom of the Deccan.

To some extent the Behmani Sultanate (1347-1527) may be considered a historical landmark in the history of the Deccan. From its ruins rose five kingdoms, viz those of the Nizam Shahs of Ahmadnagar, the Barid Shahs of Bidar, the Imad Shahs of Berar, the Qutb Shahs of Golkonda and the Adil Shahs of Bijapur. These Deccani states had a mixed population of Muslims (mostly of Indian extraction) and Hindus, as well as of Turks, Persians, Arabs and Africans. Even three of the Sultans were either converts or immigrants. Ahmad Nizam Shah I of Ahmadnagar was the son of a Hindu slave converted to Islam, Yusuf Adil Shah of Bijapur was a descendent of the Ottoman dynasty of Istanbul who had sought refuge in the Deccan, and Sultan Quli Qutb Shah of Golkonda was a Black sheep Turkman prince who had fled to India when White sheep Turkman conquered their kingdom in western Iran in 1467.

Though each had a peculiar background, most Sultans had a taste for art and literature and promoted a creative atmosphere in their states. Lured by their generous patronage, *Sufis*, writers, merchants, warriors and other meritorious persons from all

over the Middle East came to these kingdoms to preach and learn, to devote themselves to writing and thought, and also to earn and conquer. Those days, the Deccan had become the greatest centre of Arabic learning and literary pursuits in India. It continued to hold this position till the Mughals invaded and conquered it in 1687.

As regards the art of the Deccan, geography alone cannot define or characterise it. Though created there, it would be too shallow to label it South Indian art. Nor is it Iranian, even though it draws its inspiration from Iran. It seems that the indolent Sultans of the Deccan who had brought with them a world different from the one they now called home and loved no less, inspired a pungent amalgam of both and became instrumental in the creation of a new style of art.

In the latter half of the 16th century, there occurred at Ahmadnagar, Golkonda and Bijapur a notable fusion of the early style of Deccani painting with the Islamic idiom placing them on a parallel footing with Mughal painting. The rhythmic delicacy of Persia, the lush sensuality of southern India and the restraint of European and Ottoman Turkish portraiture mark Deccani art and, at the same time, these aspects contribute to the uniqueness of these paintings. Hence, highly charged compositions and intense colours give Deccani paintings a moody romanticism which even Mughal paintings sometimes lack.

Yusuf Adil Shah (1489-1510) who founded the Adil Shahi dynasty at Bijapur in 1489-90, came to India in circa 1460 as a young man from Iran and rose to his position as Shah due to his ability, courage and personality. In the year 1489, he assumed the highest title and read the *Khutaba* of Bijapur in his own name. He was an elegant writer in Persian and being himself a poet, a good judge of poetical compositions. He invited artists, scholars, poets and calligraphers to his court and established contact with Iran, Persia and Turkey, bringing in cultural innovations from these countries. He made excellent arrangements for the stay of the artists he invited so that they chose to continue to live at Bijapur for the rest of their lives. His tastes and skill in music evoked great respect. He performed to the admiration of all on two or three instruments and, in his lighter moments, would sing his own improvised, compositions.

Ismail Adil Shah, his son, came to be known in history, like his father, as a man of taste. He composed poetry under the pen-name of *Wafa-i* in Persian. He proved a great patron of poets and of men of learning and distinction, and took delight in their company. He was also adept at drawing, painting, jewel-setting and bow-and-arrow making. His love for refinement and sophistication included a fine food table and clothes.

It is said Shah Ismail of Iran heard of him and was so impressed that he sent an ambassador to his court who addressed him as Shah. From then onwards, the Sultans of

Bijapur considered themselves superior to other Indian kings. Though Ismail Adil Shah strictly followed the *Shia* practice of Islamic tradition, yet in the field of the arts he was able to generate a liberal climate. His passion for anything artistic included the Indian and the foreign, and he especially patronised miniature painters for illustrating books. Contrary to this, his son Ibrahim Adil Shah I (1534-58) was an ardent *Sunni* who went to the extent of abolishing Persian as language of the court for public accounts.

Ali Adil Shah-I succeeded his father in 1558. A man of simple habits who did not believe in formalities regarding his dress and costume, he wore *Shahi* robes only on state occasions. He delighted in the company of saints, *faqirs* and *Sufis* and even invited Catholic missionaries to his court. He loved books and not only encouraged writing but also established an excellent library. He appointed the Sanskrit scholar Shesh Waman Pandit as his librarian. Attached to the library was a scriptorium where nearly 60 men, calligraphers, gilders of books, book binders and illuminators were regularly at work.

The best known manuscript of his time (dated 1570-71) entitled *Nujum-al-Ulum* is now in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin. The book is a compilation of facts on astronomy, magic, animals and weapons. Several miniatures represent Hindu deities. It contains 876 illustrations, some of which occupy full pages while others are only marginal decorations. Some of these paintings, as the one depicting lions and swans, are in pure Deccani style. The figures of women are bedecked with a profusion of jewellery, their saris draped in the southern fashion. The most favoured colours are bright orange, moss green, brownish red and royal blue. These are widely used in this manuscript. Later Bijapur paintings continued to use these hues. Another known manuscript of this period containing miniatures is on music. It is a Marathi commentary on Sarangdeva's *Sangita-Ratanakara*. Though it contains only four miniatures, its style is considered important.

Ibrahim Adil Shah-II (1579-16) is a notable figure from medieval Deccan. He was only nine years old when he succeeded his uncle Ali Adil Shah I. A favourite nephew of Ali Adil Shah I, Ibrahim was influenced in his early childhood by the mysticism of his uncle. In his youth he also came in contact with *Nathpanthis* and other mystics who travelled the region for propagating their sect.

Another early influence on Ibrahim was his aunt, Chand Bibi of Ahmadnagar. The noble queen instilled in the boy-Sultan a love for the land of his birth, its people and language. Chand Bibi, the wife of Ali Adil Shah-I, was the most popular personage of Bijapur and after the death of her husband, she led the state to great heights, particularly with regard to patriotism. A woman of great intelligence who accompanied her husband in his campaigns and rode by his side in the battlefield, during times of

peace she handled most public affairs in an open *durbar*. Known for her ability, political talent and intelligence, she was able to save her kingdom from partition and ruin despite being surrounded by enemies. Described as one above temptation, she was generous, frank and merciful as well chaste, virtuous, religious and charitable. Even among the male rulers of India, Chand Bibi stands out as a jewel without flaw and beyond price.

For the first ten years of Ibrahim's rule, Bijapur was practically ruled by regents. His personality blossomed only after he shook off the trammels of Dilawar Khan Habashi in 1590. Like the Mughal emperor Akbar, he collected a number of meritorious persons in his court. Zahuri, his poet, describes six of his famous courtiers, all extraordinary in their respective fields — the chief minister, Shahnawaz Khan, a great mathematician, the poet Malik Qumi, the calligrapher Hazart Shah Khalillullah, the painter Farrukh Hussain, Khuddam Mullah Haider Zehri, a great wit and Zuhuri, the poet. Ibrahim promoted architecture and in doing so, laid the foundations of royal palaces at Nauraspur. He commissioned the famous historian Farishta to compile a history of the period. He even extended his favour and faith to temples and Hindu saints.

Bijapur witnessed a new phase of fine arts, especially painting, architecture and music during his reign. Himself a painter, musician and calligraphist, he was a true mystic who, like Akbar, founded a new faith. He bestowed high praise on the Prophet of Islam and on Hazrat Gesudaraz of Gulbarga. He believed that beneath different languages, there lay hidden a universal emotional appeal which every human being, whether Brahmin or Turk, was capable of hearing. Ibrahim Adil Shah II was attached to both cultures as an aesthete. He wrote songs on Hindu deities, Muslim saints, his admiration for his wife's beauty, his attachment to his beloved *tambura*, or for his favourite elephant, his love for life and reverence for all things.

He composed a book of lyrics, the *Kitab-i-Nauras* (book of the nine *rasas*) and wrote a treatise on chess describing new and baffling moves, but did not excel as a statesman or general. He was renowned as a fair and just monarch. He adopted the Sanskrit title *Navarasa* (new essence of the age) for presenting his new ideas in the artistic and intellectual spheres.

Though devoted to Islam and an ardent admirer of Prophet Hazrat Mohammed Sahib, Ibrahim chose the Hindu way of life. In the fifty-sixth song of his *Kitab-i-Nauras*, he assumes for himself the appearance of a Hindu god. He writes, "In one hand he has *tambura*, a musical instrument, and in the other, a book which he reads and sings songs related to the *Nauras*. He is robed in a saffron coloured dress, his teeth are black and nails are ..... red and he loves all. Ibrahim, whose father is god Ganesha and ..... mother pious Saraswati, has a rosary of crystal round his neck, a city like Vidhyapur (Bijapur) and an

elephant as his vehicle." As a musician he makes no secret of his respect for Saraswati, the patron deity of music, addressing her as his mother, while Ganapati, the God of wisdom, is referred to as his father.

The poetry in *Kitab-i-Nauras* presents Ibrahim as sensitive, romantic and creative and, at times, impulsive, reactive, melancholic and slightly unbalanced. Not one verse in the book is devoted to the theme of war or conquest. The paintings of the period too display the same characteristics, and are therefore much less realistic. If anything distinguishes them, it is the indolent, pensive and melancholic mood and the high emotion they are heavily charged with.

A number of portraits attributed to his era are available in various art collections. In them, a sense of intimacy blends with spontaneity and sumptuousness. The earliest painting usually attributed to his reign is a portrait presenting him as a plump, rosy-cheeked adolescent wearing a conical turban and an emerald necklace. Like the Mughals, he provided patronage to painters and deployed Mullah Farrukh Hussain Shirazi, his court painter, for their supervision and guidance. The court painter was reputed to have a magical touch capable of depicting even the motion of the breeze as it lifted the veil from the face of a maid, or the delicacy of a dew-drop. Deccani paintings reached their zenith during the reign of Sultan Ibrahim Adil Shah.

Under Ibrahim Adil Shah II and his successors, Muhammad Adil Shah (1627-56) and Ali Adil Shah II (1656-72), architecture, paintings and the decorative arts continued to develop. It was Muhammad Adil Shah who raised his own mausoleum, the colossal dome of the Gol-Gumbaz, which remains till date the most impressive monument of Islamic architecture in the Deccan.

With the partition of Ahmadnagar between the Mughals and Bijapur in 1636, the Mughal forces came to be permanently stationed there increasing political pressure on Bijapur and Golkonda. Besides Mughal army officers, even the maharajas of Bundi, Kotah and Bikaner spent a good deal of their time in the Deccan. These Rajput rulers had brought with them not only their families but also painters from their own courts which in turn influenced the style of painting. Mughal art aimed at realism, stressing particularly on precise portrayal and depiction of historical events. The Deccani artists chose to create a mood using extravagantly unrealistic colours and sometimes even shapes. Most Bijapuri paintings of this period are attributed to Muhammad Khan, son of Miyan Chand. Works inscribed by him suggest the Mughal influence on Deccani paintings.

A few paintings of Muhammad Adil Shah are important for tracing the history of the development of Bijapur/Deccani paintings. One such is in the India Office Library, London. It shows Muhammad Adil Shah appearing at his palace window to provide *darshan* to a

courtier in the Hindu custom. A portrait painted by Muhammad Khan in the collection of the Sawai Man Singh II Museum, Jaipur, however, conveys a stylistic Deccani glow with its deep mauve foreground, the background painted with intensity. The *durbar* of the Sultan was also painted by Muhammad Khan in the Mughal manner, now in the Sawai Man Singh II Museum, Jaipur. Mark Zebrowski reported that the most sensitive work to have survived from Muhammad Adil Shah's reign is a large drawing touched with colours and gold depicting the assembled Bijapuri court. The Sultan performs religious rites in a large pillared hall before a garlanded sanctuary which contains a golden box inscribed with the names of Allah and Muhammad. Forty-two courtiers and *mullahs* stand in a ring around the Sultan in pious poses. Most of them hold their hands outstretched, palms up in prayer, holding rosaries for saying prayers. These paintings bespeak of the Mughal influence on Deccani paintings.

Golkonda was another centre in south India where Deccani art found the right climate to germinate and prosper. Sultan Qutb Shah (1512-43) had founded in 1512 the state of Golkonda which came to be known as Qutb Shahi. He was an immigrant and had come to India from Iran with his uncle Allah Quli. Sultan Quli was dynamic and scholarly, combining in himself martial skills, chivalry and discretion. He was able to attract the attention of the Behmani Sultanate and had himself nominated as the *Tarafdar* of Golkonda. Here he found opportunity to perfect himself and consolidate his position, though he got his recognition only after he was able to quell the rebellion of Goa in 1493. He was given the title of *Qutb-ul-Mulk* and the governorship of Tilangana. He was addressed as the master of both the sword and the pen.

He conquered more territories and captured nearly seventy forts and fortresses, extending the boundaries of his charge upto Macchalipatnam on the Bay of Bengal. Later, he declared himself independent and laid the foundation of the Qutb Shahi dynasty based on the cultural model of the Shia sect of 15th century Iran. A devout Shia himself, he ably administered the new kingdom and beautified his fortress-capital with mosques, palaces and gardens. He replaced the mud fort and built the Golkonda fortress of stone. Till his death in 1543 at the age of ninety, he managed his state ably and well.

Three of his successors brought to Golkonda only uncertainty and misrule. This would have continued further had Jamshid Qutb Shah's infant son succeeded him as the ruler. Instead, Jamshid's brother Ibrahim Qutb Shah (1550-80) who, called back from Vijaynagar where he was in exile for the last seven years, was put to the charge of the state as its Sultan. He had ascended the throne in 1550.

The first three years of his reign passed in managing conflicts with the states of Bijapur and Ahmadnagar. However, in 1565 an accord was arrived at and the four

Muslim Sultans of the Deccan forged an alliance among themselves. Their united strength defeated the only Hindu state of Vijaynagar, the fall of which had a major impact on the history of south India.

Ibrahim now had time to look into the affairs of his state. He enforced law and order in the kingdom. For keeping a check on the affairs of the state, as also on his nobles, he established an intelligence department. He rebuilt Golkonda fort and strengthened it with a double rampart 8,000 metres in circumference with eight iron gates and 400 bastions. He also constructed the Hussain Sagar artificial lake and a new township named Ibrahimpattam, 16 miles away from the capital, around a second artificial lake. Both lakes are still intact.

Though Ibrahim maintained Persian as his court language, he proved a great patron of Telugu and was responsible for its literary fluorescence, and for the rise of the *Dakhni* idiom which later bloomed fully into Urdu. The credit for the development of Kuchipudi as an independent dance form goes solely to Ibrahim. But for the exception of an illuminated copy of the *Quran* which is dated prior to him and is reported to have been produced for Sultan Quli Qutb Shah, the earliest miniatures from Golkonda belong to the period of Sultan Ibrahim's reign.

Ibrahim Quli Qutb Shah was succeeded by his son Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah (1580-1612) born of his Hindu wife Bhagirati whom he had married during his exile in Vijaynagar. Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah inherited a prosperous empire with a fortified, densely populated and majestic capital. In 1591 he laid the foundation of a new city, Bhagnagar, naming it after his beloved Bhagmati which, under pressure from conservative *mullahs*, was later renamed Hyderabad. The city was designed with huge gardens, large squares and monumental buildings. The famous Char Minar of Hyderabad was created during his reign.

Sultan Muhammad Quli Qutab Shah was a gifted linguist and an architect. He was fluent in both Telugu and Persian and composed poetry in Deccani. He was a great connoisseur of arts and literature, wrote poems in Hindi, Deccani and Persian, and collected them in a book named *Kulhat-a-Shahi*. The quality of these poems and of his other writings place him among the finest poets to use the early Deccani idiom of that language. They also class him as India's first great Urdu poet. Not much is known of the personal appearance of Sultan Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah, as no portrait, painted or recorded during his lifetime, has come to light. A late-17th century portrait is reported from Raza Library, Rampur, though without any collateral evidential material about the authenticity of the details of Sultan Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah's personal likeness.

After the death of Sultan Muhammad Quli Qutab Shah, his son Muhammad Qutb Shah ascended Golkonda's throne. His reign began from 1612 and ended in 1627. History has not attributed much to him and little is known of his personality except that he was a religious, pious man who died early, leaving behind a minor son and a wife who was very talented. A portrait preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, painted during his lifetime by the famous artist Hashim depicts him as an introvert in a sad and pensive mood, as a person of delicate build. The portrait is inscribed in emperor Jahangir's own hand 'a good likeness of *Sultan Muhammad Qutb-al-Mulk*', which beyond doubt authenticate the details of the portrait and multiply its historical importance.

Abdullah Qutb Shah (1626-72) inherited both, the throne of Golkonda from his father Muhammad Qutb Shah as also a rapidly changing political situation. In 1630, Shahjahan invaded the Deccan and marching south, captured Daulatabad, the capital of Ahmadnagar. Nizam Shahi Sultan was arrested and sent to Gwalior as a Mughal prisoner. In 1635, Abdulla Qutb Shah was also forced to submit to the Mughal emperor. Thereafter, under the protection of Mughal emperor Shahjahan, Abdulla Qutb Shah continued to reign till 1656. At the time of the deed of submission, Shahjahan sent to Abdulla Qutb Shah his jewel-studded portrait. Abdulla Qutb Shah reciprocated by sending to the emperor his portrait. The relations, however, did not remain as smooth with the result that in 1656 Shahjahan sent Aurangzeb to sack Hyderabad. Abdulla Qutb Shah sought to be pardoned, paying one crore rupees in damages and pledging his daughter's hand to Aurangzeb's son, Prince Muazzam, as a token of permanent bondage.

Succeeding Abdulla Qutb Shah in 1672, Sultan Abul Hassan Qutb Shah (1672-87), nicknamed *Tana Shah* which, in Deccani, means the 'king of taste', ruled Golkonda till 1687. He was a disciple of the *Sufi* Shah Raju of Gulbarga. As a result, he was unusually tolerant and imbued with *Sufi* ideals. He spent fourteen years as a pupil of Shah Raju at the shrine of Gesudaraz. Detached from the pleasures and pains of life, it is said that when in 1687 Aurangzeb had defeated the Sultan and a band of Aurangzeb's generals rushed to Tana Shah's apartments, they heard a calm voice inviting them to breakfast. The voice belonged to Sultan Abul Hasan Qutb Shah who had just begun his breakfast. His success in maintaining a politically peaceful atmosphere in the state, his proverbial passion for arts and his mystical inclinations are reminiscent of the young Ibrahim Adil Shah II of Bijapur. He ruled Golkonda in peace till 1687 when his reign was extinguished by Aurangzeb.

The tradition of Deccani miniatures, as is known today, began by and large during the reign of Sultan Ibrahim Qutb Shah. However, an illuminated copy of the holy *Quran* dated 943 AH, i.e. 1536-37 AD, reportedly produced for Sultan Quli Qutb Shah,

preceded him. This copy is preserved in the Salarjung Museum, Hyderabad, and though it is only decorative, its strong colours — blue, pink, red — are typically Deccani. Also painted in his reign were the *Anwar-i-Suhaili*, an illustrated manuscript in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, bearing the Qutb Shahi seal, *Sindbadnama*, another illustrated manuscript in the India Office Library, London, *Surahs of the Quran* in the Salarjung Museum, Hyderabad, and an undated *Yusuf and Zulaykha* by Jami in the British Library, London. These illustrated manuscripts have attributes that mark a departure from the earlier mural tradition of Deccani art with an identity that distinguishes them from the miniature style of other regions, and particularly Mughal India.

Illustrations to the *Kulliyat*, or the collected works of Muhammad Quli date to the late-16th century and are among those earlier Golkonda paintings which are more characteristically in the style of miniature paintings that we call Deccani. Though there are only eight of these, they are so richly drawn that they make the manuscript one of the great works of art of miniature and calligraphy. These miniatures are in the best Persian style, though the thick use of gold and bluish-purple and red are typical of Golkonda. It is clear from the manuscript that Muhammad Quli's atelier was a cosmopolitan place where Persian, Central Asian, Mughal and Deccani artists worked together under one roof.

So far Iranian, and to some extent Persian, influence created the distinguishing element in Deccani paintings. Mughal miniature paintings in north India had already shaken off their earlier Persian influence and established a tradition of their own. During the period of Abdulla Qutb Shah (1626-1672) the Golkonda paintings also made a departure from the earlier Persian and to some extent Iranian influences and preferred to borrow Mughal elements, especially their charm and elegance. However, the background landscapes remained quintessentially Deccani and consisted of mango trees with mangoes, squirrels and parrots painted on them, and palmyra trees. Attributes identifying them as Golkonda paintings were an emotional and vigorous thrust, an expression of excitement, strong moods, sentiments. A portrayal of Abdulla Qutb Shah shown riding an elephant in a procession attended by several of his courtiers, singers and an orchestra in the collection of the State Public Library, Leningrad, is a typical Golkonda miniature of this period. It records with dramatic intensity, which is typical of the Deccan, the vigorous poses, the strong surge of a moving crowd and the overall mood of excitement. The colours are used not only to delineate forms but also to express excitement and mood. The contrast of colours arrived at by streaking the deep-blue sky with orange clouds and by studding the gold cast central pavilion with white, green and red jewels is typical of Golkonda.

This and other paintings evidently prove that by the mid-17th century Deccani paintings, particularly at Golkonda, were heading towards dazzling new heights.

Deccani miniatures during the reign of Sultan Abul Hasan Qutb Shah exhibit a further advancement. Besides expressing the dramatic intensity of mood, the paintings of the period of Sultan Abul Hasan Qutb Shah bring to the surface the inner feelings of the persons portrayed. The portrait of the Sultan himself, preserved in the Binney Collection, San Diego, reveals the Sultan's inherent inner personality consisting of his gentle, calm and poetic temperament and his passion for nature. His reverence for his Guru Shah Raju and his son Akbar Shah of Gulburga and his mystical inclination are perfectly expressed in two paintings published by Mark Zebrowski in his book, *Deccani Paintings*. The smile on the face of Shah Raju and the cool harmony with which white, gold and bluish grey, and to some extent even the tones of maroon, are used in his portrait reveal the noble teacher within him and his saintliness. The portrait of his son Akbar Shah, though rendered with stately grandeur and with a rich background, does not fail to reveal the mystic and spiritual bent of the young saint's mind.

After Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb had laid siege on Bijapur in 1686 and Golkonda in 1687 and had converted the two states into Mughal *subas*, the individuality and, to a great extent, the very quality of Deccani paintings deteriorated, though their production continued. Aurangzeb had little liking for painting or for any other art, hence his invasion of the Deccan proved counter productive. Without state protection and patronage, the artists of the Deccan were forced to serve inferior masters, such as the officers of the Mughal army or the Rajput chieftains who travelled to the Deccan either to serve the Mughal emperor's ends or as his guests. They had carried with them to the south their own mediocre tastes and were only moderate pay masters. With such meagre means and poor patronage, the artists may have found it difficult to maintain the quality and the level of their paintings. Contemporary Rajput paintings show signs of Deccani influence. It seems that some of the better artists from the Deccan may have shifted to the northern parts of India, especially to Rajasthan, in search of patronage. However, after Nizamshahi was established in Hyderabad, taking under its command the entire Deccan, the art of the Deccan once again picked up momentum and its quality began to revive. The Nizams, besides paintings and portraiture, laid stress also on architecture, inlay work and textile designs. They were persons of highly artistic taste which reflects in everything created in the Deccan, whether on paper, canvas, cloth or on metal in any form whatsoever.

(preceding page) Raga Hindola
Deccan, Ahmadnagar, Bijapur,
circa A.D. 1595
Paper, 23.8 x 18.3 cm
Acc. No. BKN: 2066

Raga Hindola, a melody sung to celebrate the *sravana* festivity of swings, is named after the *hindola* used by young couples for enjoying the season. In paintings Krishna, and sometimes a royal personage, with or without his spouse, seated in an ornamented swing with damsels around carrying musical instruments and garlands, visualise the *raga*. Raga Hindola is represented when *Vasanta*, dallying in the company of his impassioned beloved inside a grove of mango trees entwined by fresh creepers is cooled by a sprinkling of liquid waters of saffron and camphor. Having the beautiful complexion of a blue lotus and wearing red garments, the hero holds the red off-shoots of the mango in his hand. He is sprayed with liquid musk and sandal which young girls throw on him impelled by feelings of love. The hero wears a *pagri*, a red, flowered *chakdar jama* and green trousers; and the heroine a blue *ghagra* and a green *odhani*. The foreheads of all the figures are painted with saffron-coloured sandal paste. The six lines of text state that the season depicted is the joyful festival of *Vasant*.

This painting (and the next one) are from the earliest known *Ragamala* series from Bijapur, Deccan, in which inscriptions of texts relating to the *raga* themes have been first incorporated with the paintings. This was a new dimension of *Ragamala* paintings which was later emulated by all other schools. These paintings present a superb combination of the emotional depth of Indian music and the decorative quality of Persian colouring.

Ragini Patahamsika
Bijapur/Ahmadnagar, Deccan, circa A.D. 1590-95
Paper, 22.5 x 17.5 cm
Acc. No. BKN: 2063

The traditional mode for conveying a *raga*, the Indian musical mode, has always been sound, but the artists of medieval India tried, and very successfully, to capture the essence of these *ragas* through lines and colours, and the outcome of these innovations has been labelled the *Ragamala* paintings. These paintings are invariably based on the literary renderings of *ragas*, an unparalleled feat of transforming an audio medium to a visual one. These *Ragamala* paintings have the same effect on the viewer as the melody of the *ragas*, when sung, has on the listener. *Ragini Patahamsika* is said to be the haunting melody expressing the longings of a woman separated from her lover.

In the visual medium of miniature paintings, this expression is symbolised by a love-lorn lady sitting in a pensive mood, usually singing a sad song, or playing a sad tune on some musical instrument with a friend consoling her and a maid attending upon her. It is this very phenomenon which the artist has tried to create in this painting. Of the two ladies attending on her, one is obviously a friend, indicated by the informal style of her posture as she leans against the seat of the principal figure, and from the shoes she wears inside her canopy. The figure of the bare-foot lady on her left is definitely a servant's. The architecture amidst which the scene is laid is marked by the Persian influence on it. The painting is horizontally divided into three zones for effect. The broadened, widened space makes the feeling of loneliness more intense. The earliest known Deccani *Ragamala* paintings have come from Bijapur/Ahmadnagar. They are masterpieces and are scattered over various collections of international museums and private persons. The National Museum also has the credit of having two such *Ragamala* paintings. The fine colour composition, the use of bright colours and the lovely female figures are features that convey the mood of the occasion and add to the beauty of the painting.

रुवर्णरूपाढ्या वासःस्रजासन
ग्रह तांविरतिश्चामरा चैः

ब्रितमविदित्यैवचादायवीणा
सारवीनीः॥१॥

PORTRAIT OF MALIK AMBAR
Ahmadnagar, Deccan, circa A.D. 1610-15
Paper, 20.5 x 10 cm
Acc. No. 50.14/8

Malik Ambar was a slave, but an able man, a born leader and one of the great statesmen that medieval India possessed. In warfare, in state craft, in sound judgment and administration, he had no one to rival or equal him. He put down with an iron-hand the forces of lawlessness and devised an excellent revenue system known as *Malik Ambar Dhara* which became the basis of all future revenue systems in the Deccan. This system provided financial stability to the state. His training to the soldiers, mostly Marathas, in the guerrilla method of warfare enabled them to cope successfully with the imperial armies of the Mughals. These qualities of mind and action enabled him to rise to the eminence of minister and commander-in-chief in the kingdom of Ahmadnagar. The Mughal court chronicler, Mutamid Khan, wrote of him: "History records no other instance of an Abyssinian slave arriving at such eminence." He died in May 1626 at the age of nearly eighty and was buried at Amrapur, thirty-two miles from Ahmadnagar fort. Jahangir had a violent aversion for Malik Ambar. Ambar in Arabic means a rich perfume. He not only disliked this perfume, but even ordered his court painter to depict the object of his hatred. Abul Hasan performed his task superbly, showing Jahangir shooting the severed head of Malik Ambar mounted on a long shaft. This painting is in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. collection.

In this rare portrait, Malik Ambar is shown as a man of dark complexion with a bull-like neck, thick lips, hooked nose and a strong physique. He is seen wearing a compact, cap-like turban of red striped muslin, a white *jama*, red *pyjama* and shoes, a white *dupatta* and a golden *kamarband* (waist-sash). His green writing case is attached to the red belt. He is armed with sword, dagger and knife. The Persian inscription on the back indicates his name.

PORTRAIT OF ABDULLA QUTB SHAH
Bijapur, Deccan, circa A.D. 1640
Paper, 18 x 13 cm
Acc. No. 61.1004

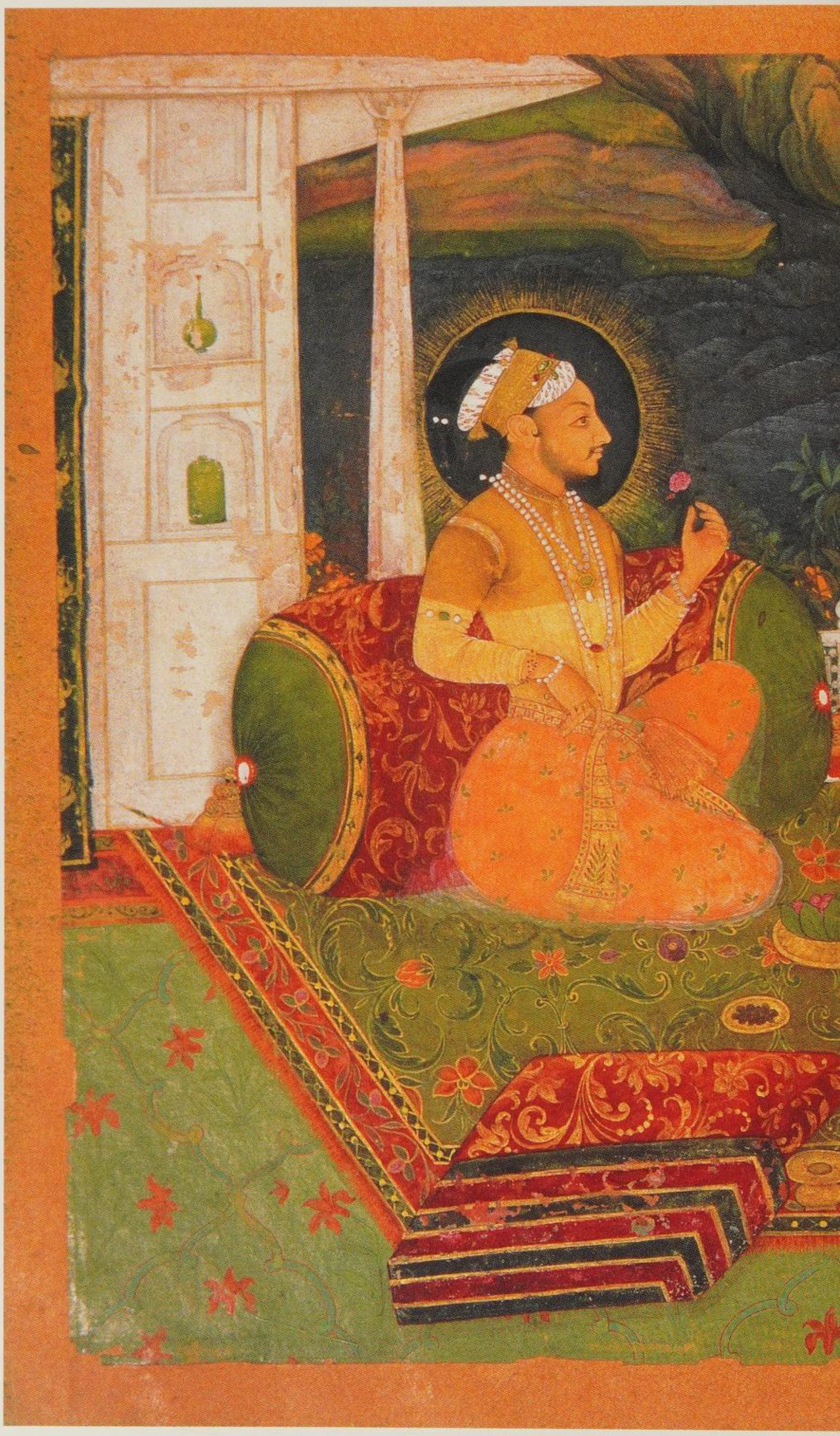
Abdulla Qutb Shah of Golkonda ruled from 1626 to 1672. He was heavily pressurised by the Deccani ambitions of Shahjahan and, in 1635, was forced to become a vassal of the Mughal empire. Painting during his reign took a decidedly Mughal turn, replacing the heavy stylisation of earlier Golkonda paintings.

The portrait of the young Abdullah-Qutb Shah is Mughal in style. He is shown in profile, seated on a cushioned *takht-posh* placed over a carpeted garden-terrace. The sword in his right hand and the green nimbus around his head indicate his royalty. His posture and attitude capture his firm resolve. His long brocade *jama* attests to his physical features and brings his face into sharp focus. Stylistically, the artist has used stippling and soft tones of shades for delineating facial features, resemblance and the three dimensional effect. Curvilinear lines are used for presenting the folds and falls of the costume. The green colour is a dominant factor in the picture. The painting is encircled with a narrow band of floral border in two colours, which is further enclosed by an ornamental outer border. The name of the Sultan is inscribed on the top of the painting. A similar painting of the Sultan was published by Mark Zebrowski in his book *Deccani Paintings*, page 183, from the collection of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

PRINCE BEDAR-BAKHT ENJOYING MUSIC
Golkonda, Deccan, early 18th century
Paper, 25.8 x 35.5 cm
Acc. No. 50.14/28

The prince portrayed here is unidentified, though in all probability it is Prince Bedar-Bakht, son of Azam Shah, grandson of Alamgir (Aurangzeb) and son of Dara Shikoh's daughter. After the siege of Golkonda in 1687, Aurangzeb nominated him the Mughal Governor of a part of the Deccan. In the collection of the National Museum, New Delhi, there is an inscribed painting of Bedar-Bakht (Acc. No. 51.26) that is similarly rendered. Stylistically, the period of this painting approximates the same. The features of the two figures are strikingly similar.

This painting is marked by a striking feature. The musician singing for the prince has before him a jar of wine and a tray of snacks, obviously offered to him by the prince. In feudal life-style, this was something strange. History bears witness that Bedar-Bakht alone has been such a prince who had the generosity to offer wine and snacks even to his court musicians. A grandson of Dara Shikoh who too was liberal, Prince Bedar-Bakht also honoured artists and musicians in his court. History has known no other emperor, *sultan*, prince or even a noble, with the probable exception of Tana Shah of Golkonda, who behaved so — and the artist could not have painted it of his own fancy and without the approval of his patron prince. The time depicted in the painting is dusk. The terrace is adjacent to another palace in the distance. Nothing disturbs the peaceful atmosphere save the fragrance of flowers and the melody of the *raga*. Besides the decorative carpet, the *jali* work of the parapet is also drawn in delicate strokes. The fine linework and combination of colours clearly shows the effect of the Mughal style on this Deccani painting



RAGA BASANTA
Deccan, mid 17th century
Paper 22.5 x 14.5 cm
Acc. No. 47.110/80

Ragas as a theme have been widely used in miniature paintings by artists of all sects, schools and styles. These *ragas* or melodies evoke the inner feelings of the performers as well as the listeners. *Raga Basanta* is one of such melodies signifying spring which symbolises man's search for the joy of life. The music, the lute-playing and the dancing by men and women, the spontaneous gesture and rhythm in this painting convey the ecstasy of the deep madness of spring. This Deccan painting illustrates the unity of poetry, music and painting. In it we find a synthesis of sound, form, colour and rhythmic movement.

Portrait of Shahbaz Khan Kambo

Mughal, Aurangzeb period, dated A.D. 1683

Paper, 43 x 31 cm (with border)

Acc. No. 50.14/14

Shahbaz Khan Kambo, an officer of the Mughal court during the reign of Emperor Akbar, was assigned by the emperor to various important charges in Rajasthan, Afghanistan, the Deccan and Agra, including the operation against Maharana Pratap of Mewar wherein he was able to besiege his fort. He was raised to various ranks — from an ordinary officer to the rank of *Amir*, *Mir-Tuzuk*, chief *Bakhshi*, the administrator of Agra, *Kotwal* of the imperial camp and the guardian of Mirza Sharukh. He was allowed a fief. Shahbaz Khan Kambo had a spiritual and religious background and was somewhat indifferent to his assigned duties and to his position. He was ascetical by nature and was censured on more than one occasion and was even once imprisoned for two years. During his last days, he was deprived of his position and of his fief, and following his death his belongings were confiscated. The painting is dated 1683, i.e. eighty-four years after his death. Shahbaz Khan Kambo, before he died in 1599, had lost his rank and position and Prince Salim who succeeded Akbar as Emperor Jahangir, had himself ordered the confiscation of his belongings. Therefore, it would appear surprising that someone painted him after he had lost his position and become the subject of royal displeasure. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that in the accounts of the history of the Mughal era, there was no one else of any importance with the same name. The painting has a number of elements in the Deccani style. Possibly, therefore, it was either rendered in the Deccan or, if in any other part of the country, by some Deccani artist who immigrated to the Mughal court or to northern India. The painting bears on it the seal of Shahbaz Khan under the name — *'Shahbaz Khan Khan-e-Jad Badshah Alamgir'*. It shows too the continuity of the clan even beyond the period of Aurangzeb. Since the Mughal emperor had lost faith in the family, perhaps for acclaiming the Mughal dynasty's confidence back in the family of Shahbaz Khan Kambo in the public eye, one of his successors had the portrait done basing it on some earlier family copy of his likeness, and put his seal on it. The inscription on the top of the painting reveals his personality, further testifying that the painting depicts Shahbaz Khan Kambo. Shahbaz Khan Kambo's last assignment was in the Deccan and it is probable that when in the Deccan, his portrait was rendered. But in view of the Mughal emperor's displeasure, either the painting was retained by the artist himself or remained with someone in his family. Time and neglect may have defaced it. But after the situation normalised, a fresh copy could have been prepared with artistic improvements. The earlier inscription may have been retained. His seal too may have remained with his successors. In any case, it was a normal practice that the seals of important persons were used by their successors even after their deaths. The middle-aged, fair-complexioned Kambo is richly attired in the painting. The *huqqa* does not suit his personality, particularly because it was not in prevalence in Akbar's period. However, in the Deccan it marked rank and position, hence, the artist may have added it of his own. Different profiles of the three figures are marked with great artistic skill. The portrait is a fine example of a mixed style containing both Mughal and Deccani elements.

PRINCE ENJOYING MUSIC
Golkonda, Deccan, late 17th century
Paper, 45 x 30 cm
Acc. No. 55.24/66

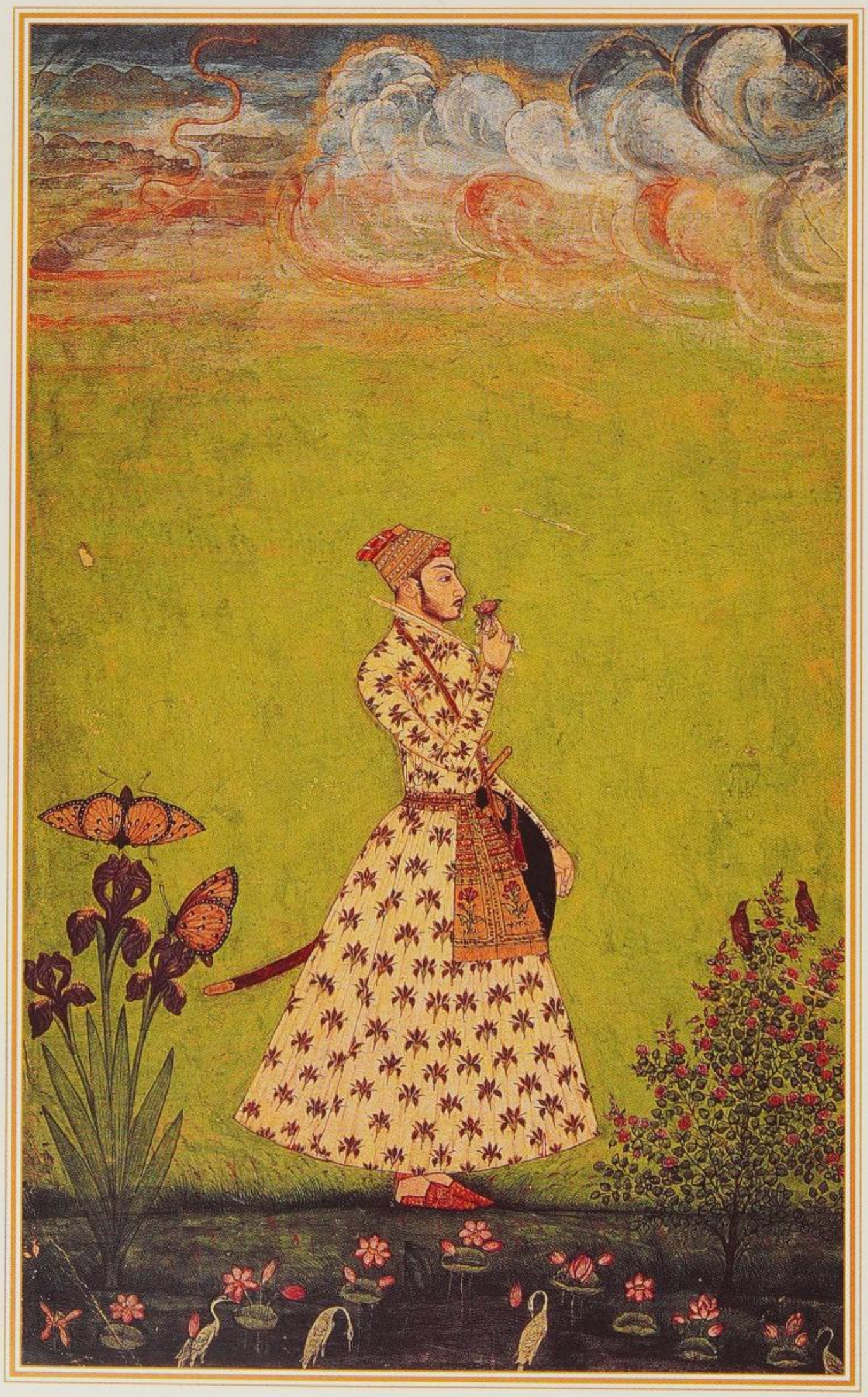
During the reign of Ibrahim Adil Shah of Bijapur in the Deccan (1580-1626), the arts, music and literature were highly favoured. However, music gained his special favour. His patronage and enthusiasm attracted poets, musicians, artists and architects to his court. He was himself a renowned poet and musician and his *Kitab-i-Nauras* (book of nine essences) contains a collection of his poems intended to be sung in different Indian classical modes.

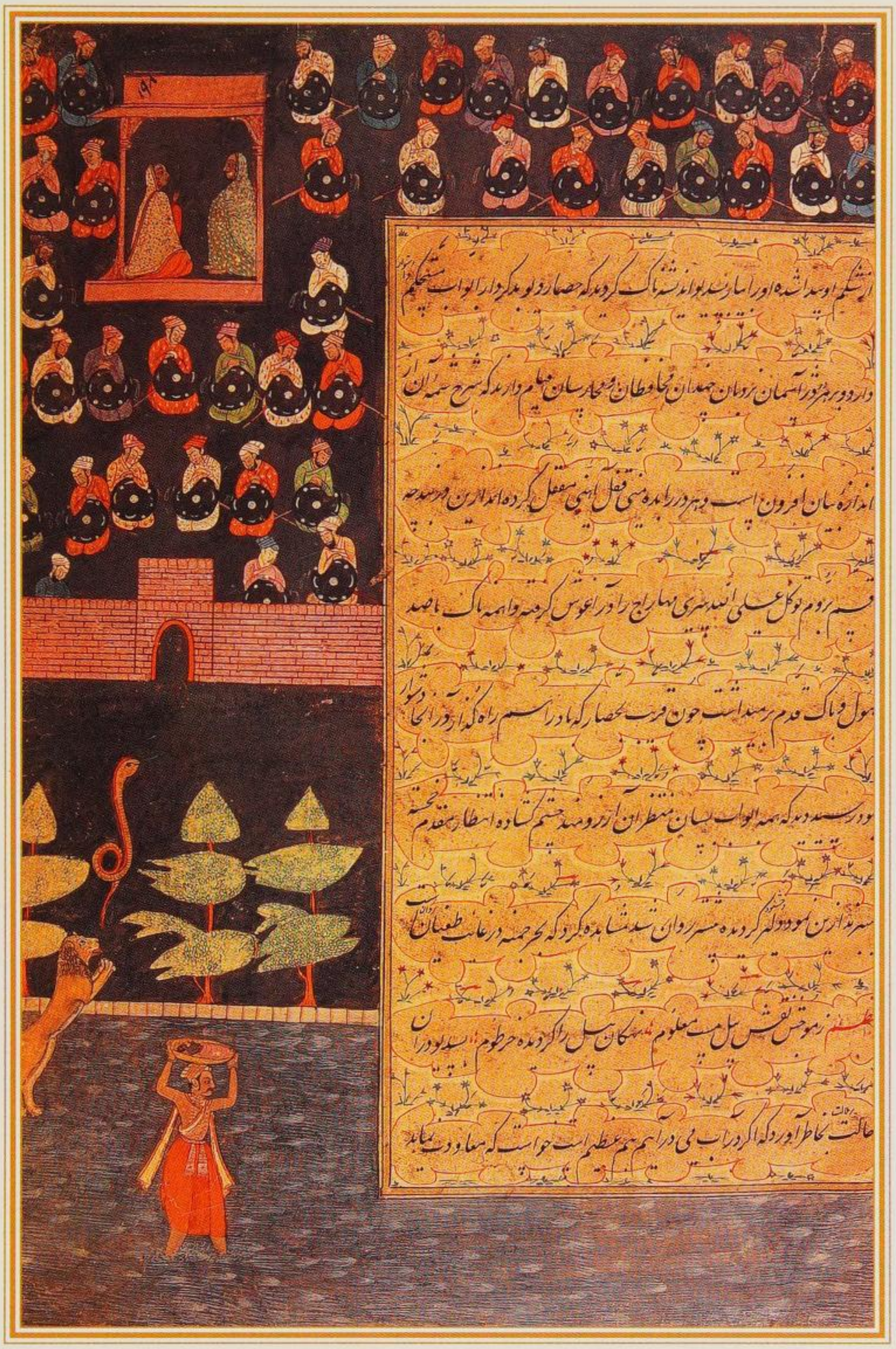
In this painting, a young prince enjoys the song of a lady singing in tune with her *tambura*. The prince holds a flower, is attired in a mauve embroidered *jama* and green *pataka*, and wears a golden turban; he is seated on a yellow carpet. The lady singer is elegantly dressed in a red *ghaghara* and adorned with gold and pearl jewellery. The green background of the painting is filled by blue clouds. The snake-like golden line in the clouds heralds rains. It is a fine painting of the late-17th century from the Deccan with prominent Deccani features. It is pasted on a blue border decorated with plants in gold.

PRINCE HOLDING A ROSE
Golkonda, Deccan, end of the 17th century
Paper, 31 x 20 cm
Acc. No. 58.30/5

Portraiture in miniature painting is considered the most delicate and subtle among its branches. Like the Mughal court, the Deccani courts too considerably improved the quality of their portraiture. As in the Mughal court, the Deccani portraiture too became a status symbol; even minor local rulers were fond of having their portraits rendered, depicting them in highly elevated postures.

In this painting, a young prince is seen sniffing the fragrance of a rose. The peacefulness of the garden and of the surroundings is remarkable. Standing in relief against a yellow-green background, he is seen wearing a cream and mauve *jama* with a turban and *pataka*. The prince is holding a long sword and a shield, and has a dagger in his girdle. Golden butterflies sip nectar from big flowers similar to the flowers on the prince's *jama*. Despite the outward conformity with Mughal costume and composition, the effect is basically Deccani which is intense, as was seen in the Bijapur paintings of the preceding century. This impressive portrait of some unknown prince from the Deccan is proof of the artistic perfection of Deccani portraiture





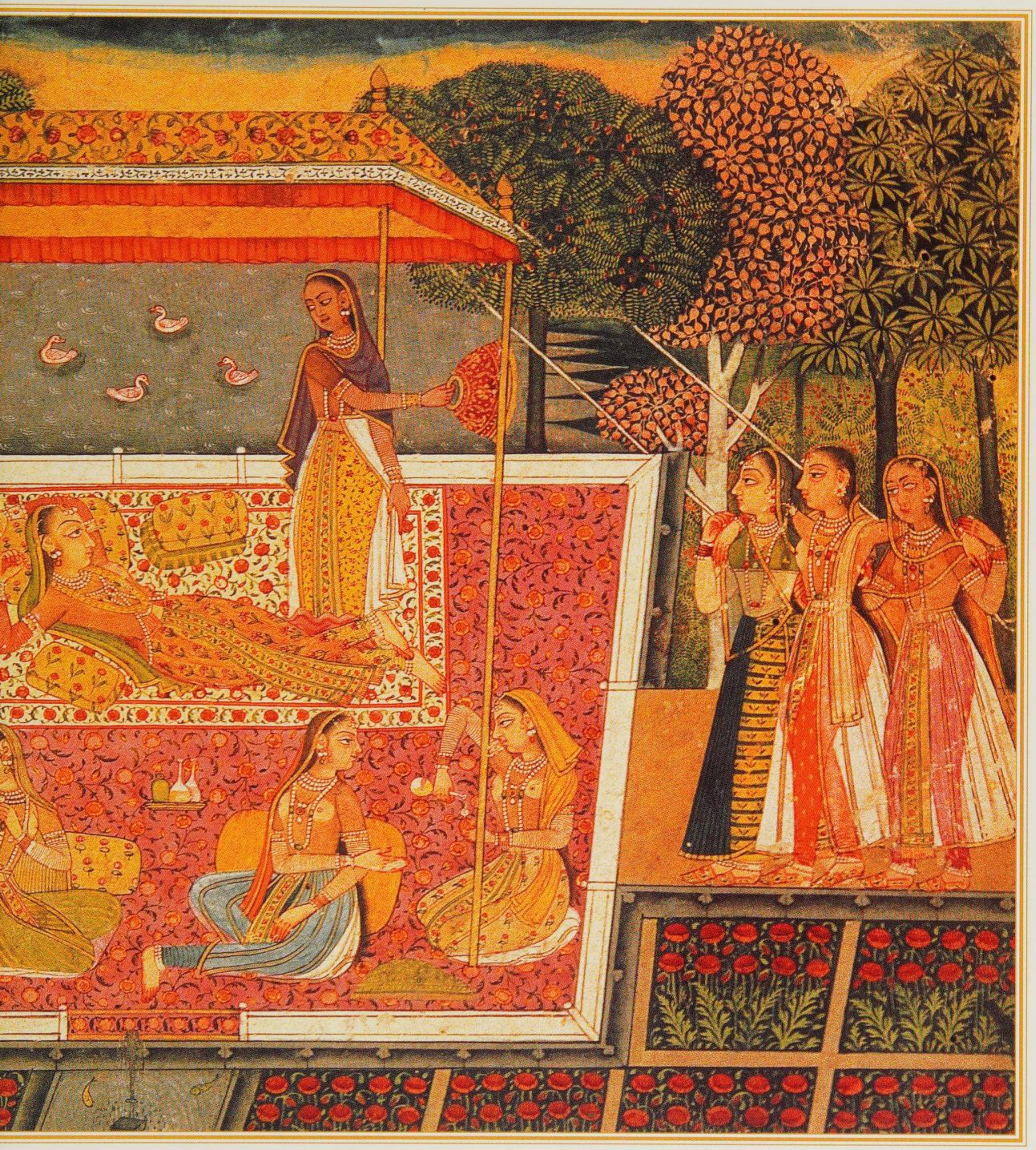
VASUDEVA TRANSFERRING KRISHNA TO GOKUL
Golkonda, Deccan, circa A.D. 1700
Paper, 37 x 27 cm
Acc No. 71.130

Kamsa, the misled king of Mathura, having heard an incorporeal voice telling him of his impending death at the hands of his sister Devaki's eighth child, had Devaki and her husband Vasudeva imprisoned and kept under heavy guard. Seven children born to the couple were put to sword. When the eighth child, a son, was born, a celestial voice told his father Vasudeva to transfer the newborn to Gokul. Vasudeva took the child and walked out of the prison uninterrupted for all the guards were in deep slumber. He crossed the Yamuna during the dark and stormy night. The river flowed gently when he entered it, for the child was none other than Krishna, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu himself.

The painting is divided into two parts. Above, inside the structure, symbolical of the fort of Mathura, is Devaki with another lady engaged in conversation on a pavilion surrounded by a large number of armed guards in deep slumber. Below, Vasudeva and Krishna are crossing the river, its fury reduced and as calm as a lake. It is only knee-deep to allow Vasudeva an easy passage. A lion stands on its hind legs, and a snake hurls itself in space for a glimpse of the divine child. A part of the space is occupied by the Persian text, beautifully written in the Nastaliq script. The characteristic features of the painting are the high turbans and the geometrical settings of the guards, the peculiar forms of stylised trees, the decorative patterns in between the calligraphic portions and the colour scheme suiting the hour of the event depicted.

PRINCESS IN DESPAIR
Golkonda, Deccan, early 18th century
Paper, 25.5 x 35 cm
Acc. No. 54.61/7

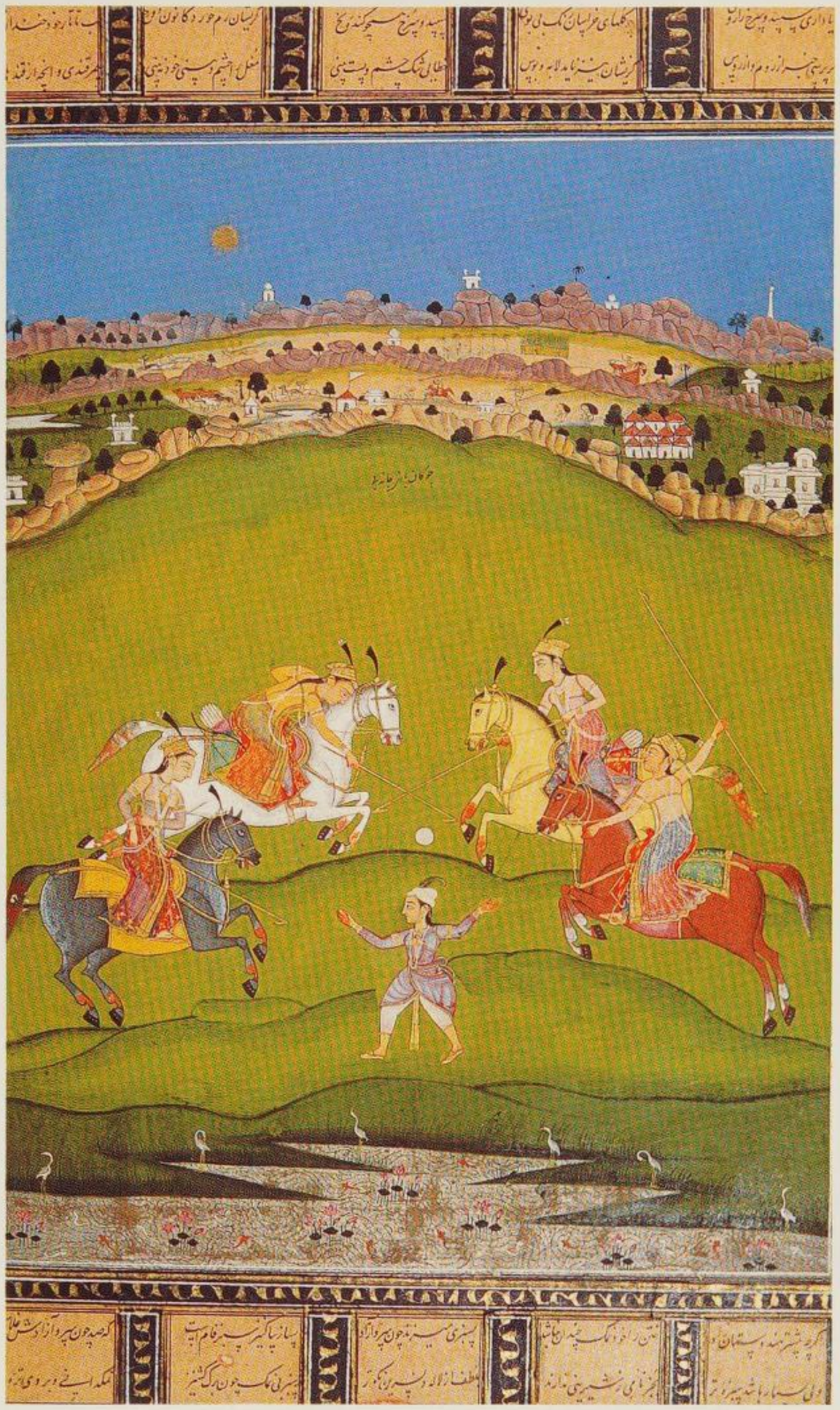
The painting depicts the moment when a noble lady chooses to go out for merry-making but, instead, becomes a victim of despair. The artist has struck this contrast by depicting two separate sets of scenes. The venue is a garden with dense trees, a beautiful lake with birds swimming in it, a golden sky and blooming flowers beds. A canopied tent has been erected. A huge *jajim* covers the ground and on it is laid a small carpet on which lies the noble lady, resting against a cushion. Everything is elegant and speaks of the status of the personage. All other women too are elegantly attired and in a festive mood. The noble lady lying on the cushion looks sick, yet there is nothing to indicate that she has any physical ailment. Perhaps she is mentally indisposed. It is obvious that the reason for her mental disposition is only concurrent and casual. It is also evident that when she set out, she was in the mood of merry-making, since she is accompanied by her friends who are seen enjoying wine, music, snacks and gossip. Her mental indisposition is reflected on the faces of her attendants as also those of her friends, a pair of whom are probably discussing the point. The artist, working under the limitations of his medium, could not perhaps elaborate the reason of her ailment, but it seems that she was to be joined with maybe her lover who has failed to appear, therefore spoiling the occasion. Her face lowered to her bosom, she seems to be pondering over the issue. The features and costumes have been delicately painted. Delicate harmonies of mauve, white, green and gold enrich this beautiful painting. A similar painting from the Archer Collection, London, was published by Mark Zebrowski in his book, *Deccani Paintings*.



Raga Malkauns
Golkonda, Deccan, early 18th century.
Paper, 28 x 17 cm
Acc. No. : 54.71/5

Raga Malkauns is regarded as a melody of unfathomable depth and relates to riches, prosperity, royal grandeur and youthful love. It is sung after midnight. The dominant spirit of *Raga Malkauns* is love manifest in enjoyment. The melancholic aspects of love are not its subject. In texts, *Raga Malkauns* is personified as 'an accomplished king of golden complexion (*raga raja*), whose words (breaths) are well-perfumed. He is seated on a throne with his consort who is suitably bejewelled to enhance her beauty. She offers him betels.'

The beautifully drawn painting here conceives the *raga* on the same masculine lines, representing it through a youthful knight holding a stick of flowers. The loving couple is seated in close proximity. The lady is offering him betels. For a suggestion of grandeur, the artist has also painted two *chowri* bearers. Painted during the early-18th century in Golkonda, the painting is a fine specimen of its time. The inscription on the top of the painting reads *Sri Raga* and has been written subsequently for there can be no doubt that it is a representation of *Raga Malkauns*.



CHANDBIBI PLAYING POLO
Golkonda, Deccan, early 18th century
Paper, 36.5 x 23 cm
Acc. No. 63.1378

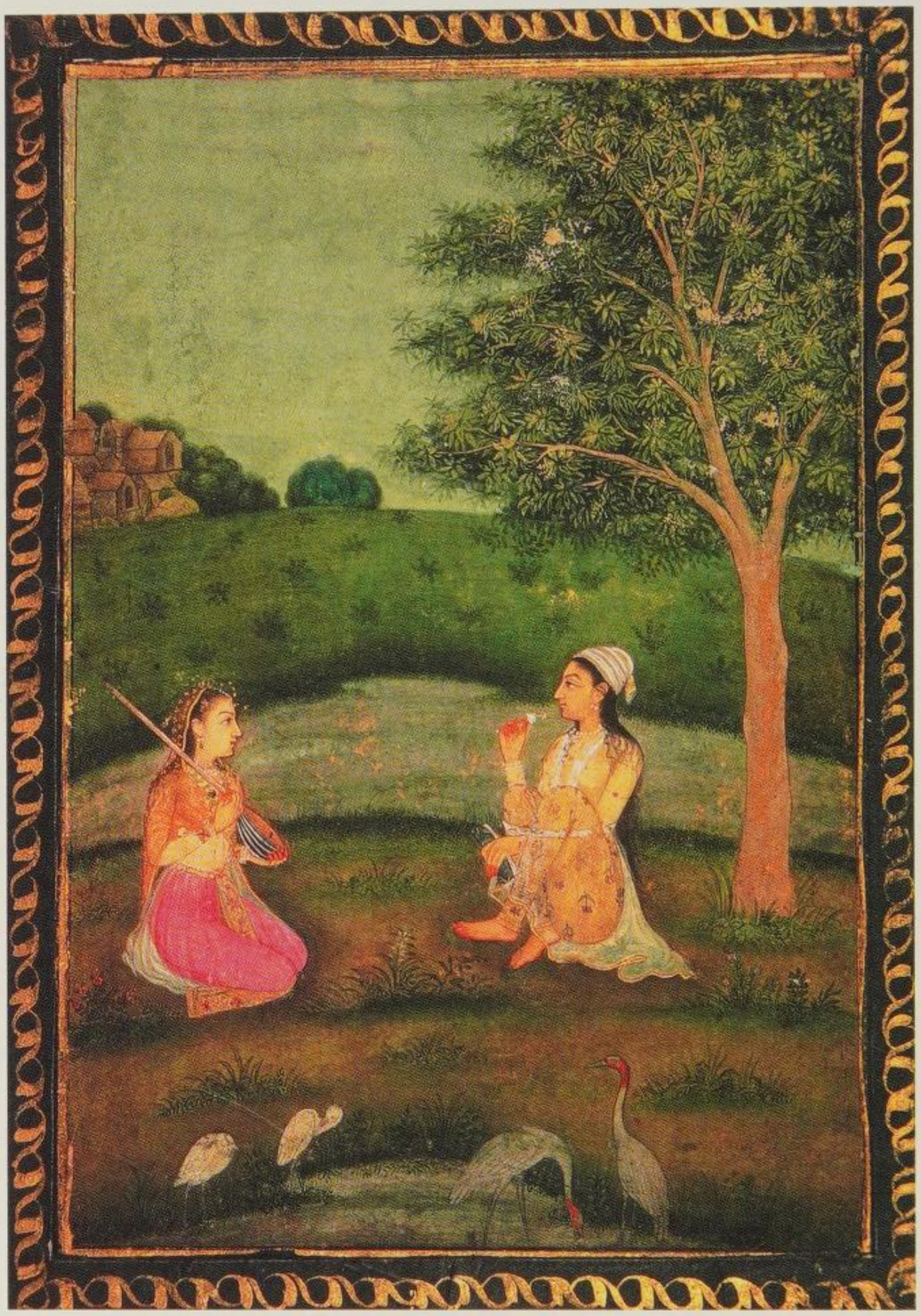
Polo, or *chaugan bazi*, a traditional outdoor game among royal families till the 18th century, was an old pastime of the feudal class. It was while playing polo in 1210 that Qutab-din-Aibak had died, falling from his horse. Akbar too was fond of polo. He said it was useful in revealing the hidden talents of the players. The ladies of the nobility also played polo. The game of polo was generally played between two teams of five players riding on horses with sticks having angular ends.

In this miniature, five princesses are shown playing polo against a dark green background. The princesses are mounted on beautifully decorated stallions of white, blue, dark brown and pale yellow colours. The colourful costumes and bejewelled head dresses of the princesses are painted with the utmost delicacy. This picture is a very good example of the early-18th century Golkonda style. In the foreground is a silvery-grey lotus lake with aquatic birds, and in the background are the receding plains depicting rocks, huts and trees. The Persian inscription in the background reads *Chaugan-Bazi-Chand Bibi*. It is said that Chand Bibi was a gallant horse rider and fine player of polo. Also known as Chand-Sultana, she was the sister of Murtaza Nizam Shah I of Ahmadnagar and the widow of Ali Adil Shah I, the Sultan of Bijapur. She is known in history for her heroic battles with the Mughal forces of Emperor Akbar. She bravely defended the fortress of Ahmadnagar against the Mughals though she failed to protect it. Chand Bibi is among a small group of historic Indian women who took on powerful men. Paintings such as this provide clues to the liberal life-style of the Deccan.

LADY OBSERVING AUSTERITY
Hyderabad, Deccan, early 18th century
Paper, 20.6 x 14.5 cm
Acc. No. 56.49/8

The nobility of the Deccan observed a custom relating to the observance of austerity for a period of about a month. According to it, ladies of the nobility would give up palatial luxuries and comforts and retire to the forest or some holy place for leading an austere life and for devoting themselves to spiritual things -keeping fasts, listening to spiritual hymns and preachings. Solitude, plain clothes, simple food, meditational practices and yoga, an indifference to luxuries, ornamentation and attendants were adopted as the mode of living.

In this painting the royal lady, obviously observing austerity as per the custom, is seen seated under a tree on bare land in a forest resort. Tying herself with a sash to provide a steadiness to her posture, the lady is seen sitting in yogic form. She is simply attired and is without ornamentation except the accoutrements required of a married lady for the well-being of her husband. Her hair is left loose, undressed. The artist has used a flower in her hand, vestiges of *henna* on her fingers and toes, some ornaments and a head-dress for indicating her personage as a royal lady. She is listening to a devotional hymn or song. Silence reigns supreme over the place save for the sound of birds. The lake nearby, with its cranes and ducks, adds to the serenity of the atmosphere. The artist has tried to create the effect of sublimity and quietude in rendering his theme.



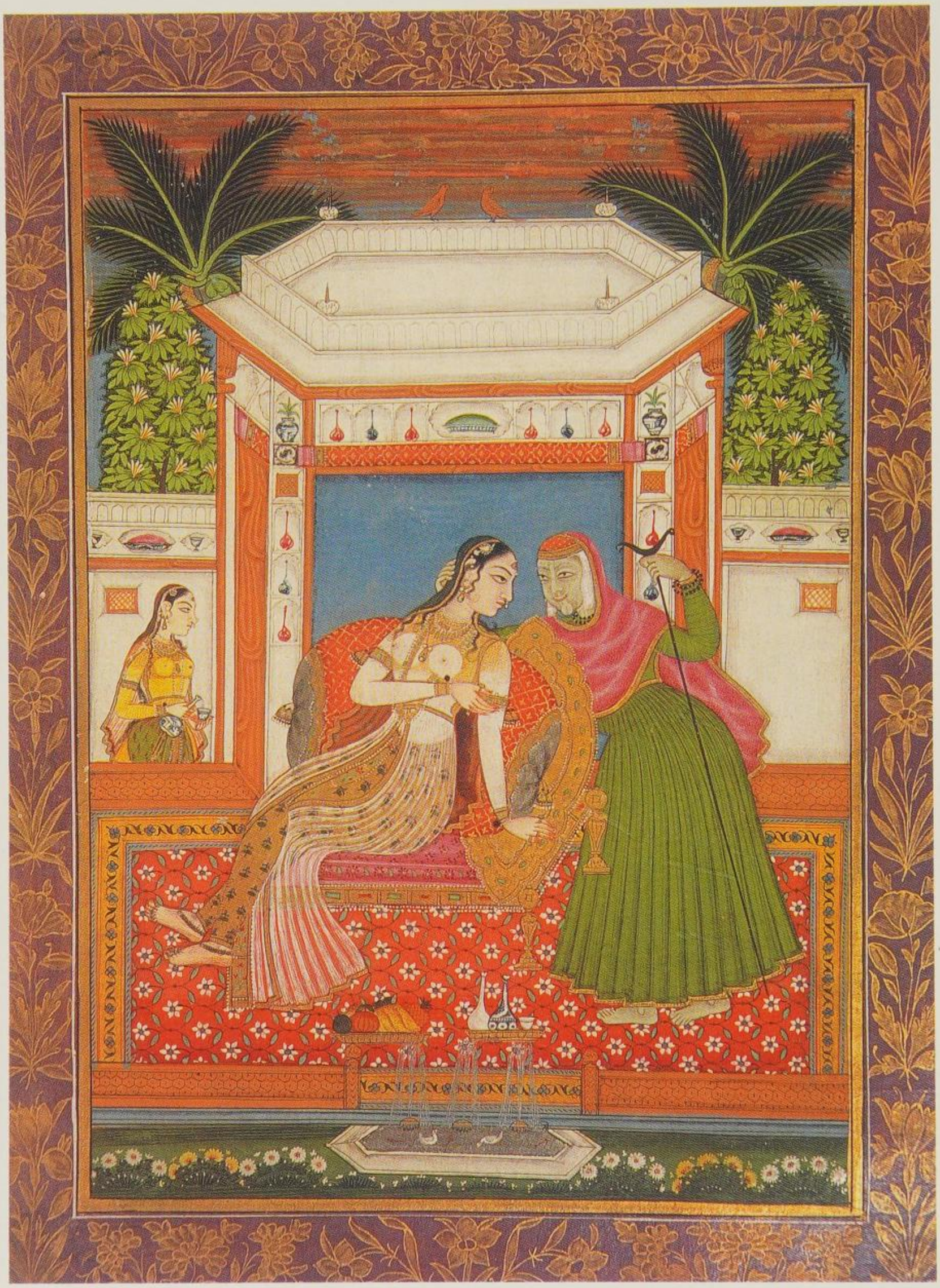
(opposite page) BAZ BAHADUR AND RUPMATI OUT HAWKING
Deccan, Hyderabad, early 18th century
Paper, 36.5 x 24 cm
Acc. No. 63.1379

The mid-16th century romantic legend of Baz Bahadur, the ruler of Mandu, and his beautiful queen Rupmati, is based on a collection of songs and couplets written in 1599 by *Ahmed-ul-Umri Turkman*. The original manuscript was copied in 1653 by his grandson and embellished with three of the pictures from the original. This copy changed hands till it reached the family of Mehbub Ali of Delhi. When C.E. Luard was writing the gazetteer of Central India, the English authorities managed to acquire the manuscript which furnished twelve *dohas*, ten *kavittas* and several *sawaiyas* of Rupmati who died a martyr to her love. Like the Mughals, the Deccani Sultans nurtured the sporting game of hunting with falcons/hawks. Falcons were in great demand for the outdoor sport of falconry in medieval India. The falcons were trained to kill when released, and then return to their owner. They dove from great heights with such speed that they seem to emerge out of nowhere. These fierce, strong birds are considered fine hunters because of their keen eyesight, powerful talons, arched beaks and broad, pointed wings. Episodes from the Baz Bahadur-Rupmati romance became a favourite subject for painters in Mughal, Pahari, Rajasthani and Deccani styles.

In this painting, the richly-dressed lovers are shown riding caparisoned stallions. Rupmati turns around to look intently at her lover who is holding a hunting falcon. In the foreground, two nude women are shown bathing, while another provides an improvised screen for them using a transparent veil when they see the sudden arrival of the royal couple. An ordinary, everyday scene of ladies bathing in a pond has been elevated to a work of art by providing the royal retinue in the background.

رو به مهتی

بازهادر



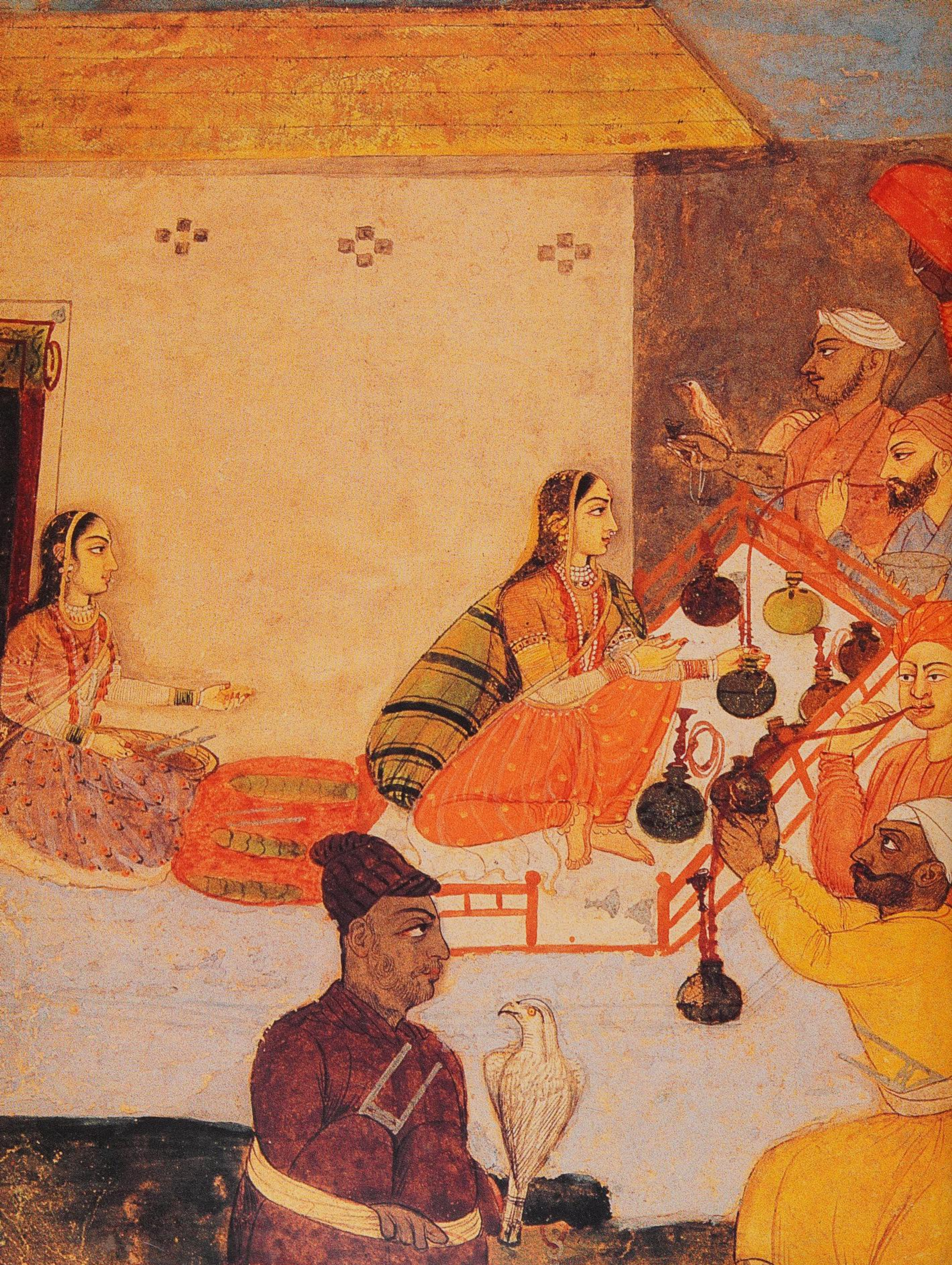
LADY WITH HER OLD CONFIDANTE
Hyderabad, Deccan, mid-18th century
Paper, 27 x 20 cm
Acc. No. 63.1808

Paintings depicting human follies and foibles are rare. In this painting, *Nayika*, the heroine, is seated on a couch in her pavilion and is engaged in conversation with an old lady who appears to be her confidential aide and has evidently come with some pleasant message. The confidential nature of their conversation is also indicated by the maid with the jar of wine who has chosen to stay out. The artist has lavished care not only in depicting the cunning smile on the face of the old lady, but also in the embellishment and curves and folds of the garments and in other details.

(following page) THE HUQQA : A PORTRAYAL
Hyderabad, Deccan, circa A.D. 1725
Paper, 25 x 35 cm
Acc. No. 55.24/64

This painting of the *huqqa* in its true perspective brings it out as a living object, a part of tradition that for centuries cast a mould of society, a community of people, or an institution. For centuries the *huqqa*, far from being a mere smoking device, had proved instrumental in bringing communities and people closer, often beyond considerations of sects and castes. In the modern sense of the term, the *huqqa* has been seen as a secular instrument strengthening mutual and social ties and community feelings. Centered around it were villagers, feudals, ascetics and *faqirs*. Bejewelled with precious stones and cast in valuable metals — gold or silver — the *huqqa* enjoyed status. Cast in clay, mounted on a brass or wooden stand and connected with a wooden abdomen and a flexible pipe, the common man's *huqqa* served to bring people closer and sort out social differences and often pronounced justice. In its abstract sense, the mere concept of the *huqqa* seemed to hold society in check, providing a platform for everyone to voice an opinion or discuss an issue for popular opinion or justice. It was, therefore, an instrument that could pronounce punishment too, in preventing wrong do-ers from what it saw as a place in its ranks.

For the artist, the *huqqa* represented a living entity and deserved to be portrayed in such a spirit. The presence of the noble lady on the window of the palatial mansion seems to have no relevance to the theme. Similarly, the maid seated behind the lady giving out *huqqas* seems to constitute little part of the painting. But to the artist they were relevant. They symbolised to him the prevalence of the *huqqa* cult among both the nobility and the commoner, from a lady to a man, from a palace to a cottage. The catholic character of the soldiers with their head-dresses symbolising various cultures indicates the *huqqa's* all-embracing, secular character. The eager faces of the soldiers reflects their bond of common sharing and enjoyment which the *huqqa* was able to help impart. The earliest objects resembling the *huqqa* were found in excavations of Nishapur in Persia dating to the 9th-10th centuries. It is probable that the *huqqa* was routed to India from Persia but the time of its emergence is uncertain. In 1604, when Asad Beg, a noble of Akbar's court, came back from Bijapur in Decean, he brought with him a 'jewelled pipe' which indicates that in the Deccan, at least, the *huqqa* was in prevalence even before 1604. Later, the Mughals, Rajputs, nobles, chieftains and their women turned to it as a social habit.



(preceding page, left) HOLI IN THE HAREM
Hyderabad, Deccan, circa A.D. 1725
Paper, 29 x 19 cm
Acc. No. 47.110/486

Holi allows for liberties, not all of them holy, for this is the festival of spring when love and sensuality bloom. Even the countryside is bathed with colour and fragrance — no wonder when smearing his beloved's face with *gulal*, the paramour's hand slips from her cheeks on to her bosom and she does not draw away. The theme is often repeated in Indian music and art.

In this painting, the couple allow these liberties knowing that they have the sanction of the gods, as it were. Maddened by Holi's colours and the season's compulsions, the passionate young man is touching his beloved and she makes no move to withdraw, offering no resistance. Her shyness, however, is shared by her attendants who look away, perhaps feeling the same pull of love as their mistress. The artist has symbolised the festival through a tray of *gulal*, two pots containing coloured water, the spray-pipe in the hands of one of the attendants and the colour-spots scattered all around. In the background, flowers bloom and birds soar in the sky. Two women are playing on the flat and round drums while another is probably singing the *phag*, the song of Holi. The passionate young prince in his customary attire and his semi-clad beloved are powerfully painted. The painting is Deccani in style. It appears the artist was less interested in depicting Holi and more in painting the passions that bloom with spring.

(preceding page, right) GULRUKH BANO
Golkonda, Deccan, early 18th century
Paper, 51 x 30 cm
Acc. No. 49.4/2

Whatever the artist may have had in mind while rendering this painting, what comes through is a representation of perversion, of a life of luxurious sensuality and indulgence. Women of the *harem*, whether those who occupied them or worked there, were called to gratify the weaknesses of either their lords or their mistresses. Provided with all manner of luxuries, comforts and riches, the royal ladies could do anything but go against the wishes of their menfolk. Even nuptial bonds were not sacrosanct and like their menfolk, the ladies of the *harem* often followed the paths of their lust.

In the painting, the noble lady inscribed as Gulrukh Bano and a friend smoking a *huqqa*, along with a band of attendants, are on an outing, away from the confines of the *harem* — yet, the *harem* is not away from them. For they appear to indulge in the same perverted life-style under the tree as if in their palaces.

The addiction to alcohol and tobacco is in evidence. The underclad ladies have looks that reflect either their passionate yearnings or a deep frustration. Music seems to add further to their perversion. The representation of the rivulet and birds is still, since these do not interest the women. All the women are beautiful, with intoxicating eyes and alluring figures, yet they lack vigour and a glow on their faces. It is possible the persons represented in the painting liked it for its projection of an enviable life-style, yet posterity is likely to view it for the sense of degradation that women of the *harem* were dragged to. That, perhaps, has been the greatest contribution of the artist of the painting: as a record of life in contemporary society.

ANGELS VISITING THE PROPHET OF BIRDS
Kurnool, Deccan, mid-18th century
Paper, 30 x 20 cm
Acc. No. 57.25/15

In world mythology, the existence of beings possessed with wings — whether human, aquatic or avian — has been a part of popular imagination or belief. Such creatures are usually represented as angels.

In this painting, two such pairs of angels, one treading earth and the other descending a mountain track, are seen moving towards a *faqir* to pay their homage before him. They hold plates with flowers and sweets, obviously for his worship. The inscriptions on the painting identify the *faqir* as a prophet who, when he sang, had all winged creatures stop to listen to his melody. He was, therefore, known as the prophet of birds and winged creatures. The artist seems to suggest that sainthood has made even melody more melodious such as would make the entire universe bow in reverence before him. In the painting he has universalised the effect of the *faqir's* melody symbolically by depicting the entire universe — the sky with clouds and its creatures, the earth with its mountains, meadows, trees and plants, and the oceanic pond with its flowers, creatures, its depths and its beauties, all standing still as they listen to him, though the prophet himself remains indifferent to this mood.

نماند از جوانان کسی در شیکیر
که شرمش نیامد ز پیری همی

که بستاندم داد از این مرد پیر
زدن دست در پیرزن نامحرمی

که ای زرق سجاده زرق پوش
مرا عمر ها دل ز کف رفته بود

سیه کار دنیا خرد این فریب
بر این شخص و جان من ای

شاہ نظام الدین اولیا
امیر خسرو
9

NIZAM-UD-DIN AWALIYA AND AMIR KHUSRAW
Deccan, Hyderabad, mid 18th century
Paper, 29 x 22 cm
Acc. No. 57.30/7

Hazrat Nizam-ud-din Awaliya, revered as *Mehbub-I-Ilahi*, the beloved of God, and as *Sultan-I-Awaliya*, the King of the Sultans, was born in the year 1236-37. His father died when he was a child of five. He expressed his indebtedness to his mother Zulaykha for his early education and spiritual pursuits which made him a renowned *Sufi* saint. At the age of twenty, he became a disciple of the *Sufi* saint, Baba Farid. Seeing his interest in spirituality and mysticism, Baba Farid nominated him his vice-regent and sent him to Delhi. His relations had remained tense with the Sultans of Delhi because he never paid a ceremonial visit to the royal court. Besides, his popularity frightened them. He died at the age of ninety-one and was buried at Ghiyathpur, now east Nizammudin, New Delhi.

Amir Khusraw, the *Sufi* poet and musician and an expert in both Indian and Persian music at the court of Delhi's Sultan Ala-ud-din Khilji, was one of his disciples. He was born in Etah, led a chequered life and finally became a distinguished disciple of Nizam-ud-din Awaliya. He died in 1325, grief-stricken at the death of his *pir*. He composed several *ragas* and was a great innovator. He was the first to employ indigenous Urdu for literary purposes, and also to compose songs and write verses in it. He was the inventor of several riddles, rhymes, enigmas and verses in pun which remain popular. He introduced several Persian and Arabic elements to Indian classical music and invented musical instruments like the *sitar* and the *tabla* which are the backbone of Indian music today. This is a fine imaginary painting of Nizam-ud-din Awaliya and Amir Khusraw by a Deccani artist. The *Awaliya* is listening to his disciple's music while sitting under a mango tree. The verse is probably:

'Chal Khusraw ghar apne, sanjh bhai chahu aur' .
'O Khusraw, let us take leave, as the evening shrouds the earth all around.'

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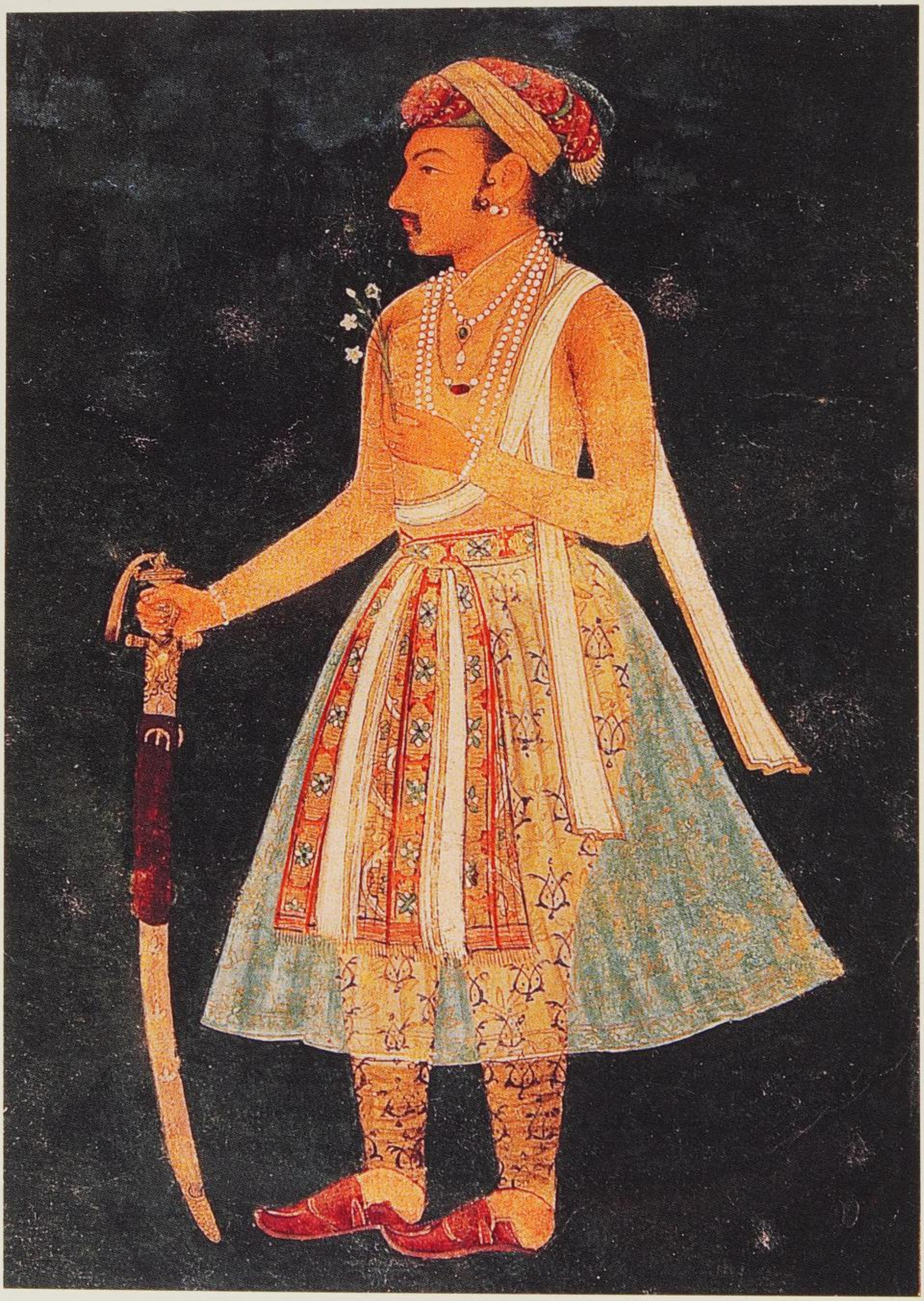

About the author

Dr. Daljeet has a number of books, catalogues, portfolios and articles on Indian art and paintings to her credit.

An eminent art scholar, she did her Doctorate on 'A Study of Central Indian Miniature Paintings-Malwa & Bundelkhand' from the Barkatulla University, Bhopal. She began her carrer as an archaeologist, worked in various fields of art, and is now, since several years in charge of the Department of Paintings, National Museum, New Delhi. She has travelled widely, in India & abroad, in connection with study, accademic pursuits and organising exhibitions. The Government of Punjab had recently honoured her with the responsibility of setting up a special exhibition on 'Sikh Heritage' in connection with the celebration of the tercentenary of the birth of Khalsa.

Forthcoming publications by Dr. Daljeet include works on the Monuments of India, Godesses in Indian Miniatures and Art Heritage of the Sikhs.

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